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THE ANGUISHED MAN IN THE WORLD
OF EUGÈNE IONESCO

by

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Presented to
The Graduate Division
Brake University

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Presented to

The Graduate Division

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Eugène Ionesco has created a bizarre and perplexing world in his plays. Bobby Watson, whose death was announced in the newspapers a year before it had occurred and whose body was warm four years after his death, is discovered to have had a wife and two children, all of whom were also called Bobby Watson. The deceased Bobby Watson had innumerable other relatives as well, male and female, who were named Bobby Watson. All of the Bobby Watsons were commercial travelers. In another play, all of the people of the world except one have become rhinoceroses. In another, a prospective bride is rejected because she is not ugly enough, for she has but two noses instead of three. The parents of this "only" child resolve the impasse by producing a sister who has the desired three noses. In still another play, the body of a dead man has been kept for years in the bedroom of apartment occupants who are not quite certain who he is. The body grows before the eyes of the audience, swelling and filling the apartment, causing walls to crack, plaster to fall. Characters speak garbled platitudes, non-sequiturs, and finally syllables that are without meaning entirely. Stages may fill, if not with a swelling corpse, then with cups and saucers that spill into the audience or with stacks

of furniture that hide the new tenant of an apartment. Although no change in time has been indicated, a middle-aged, petit bourgeois housewife becomes a young and sensuous femme fatale and then a pitiable, weeping old woman. A character identified as a Logician formulates syllogisms which are the veriest nonsense, and a girl student preparing for a doctoral degree amazes her professor by declaring without hesitation that one and one make two. Although an English housewife's husband and friends are amazed at her report that she has seen a man reading a newspaper on the underground, the characters of another Ionesco play do not find it surprising at all that a much discussed eligible daughter appears on stage as a virile man of thirty who sports a large black moustache.

Bizarre and perplexing as it is, Ionesco's drama presents a challenge to critics who attempt to find meaning in it. The usual method for determining what a work of drama means is to examine the conflicts in which the characters are involved and the way in which such conflicts are resolved. Inasmuch as Ionesco's plays lack either a discernibly logical progression of plot or consistent delineation of characters, this usual method is of limited value.¹ The reader of

¹"Since he [Ionesco] is opposed to realism, all the elements of the traditional play are discarded. Plot, logical sequence, development of crises, use of time and space, give way to juxtaposition of images often violent and contradictory." Allan Lewis, The Contemporary Theatre (New York: Crown Publishers, 1962), p. 268.

Ionesco's plays does discover, however, that certain kinds of confusion recur with remarkable frequency. The purpose of this study will be to examine these confusions closely and to explicate the meaning of the drama of Eugène Ionesco by showing that through such recurring motifs the plays objectify the bourgeois world which has deluded man and caused his anguish.

Perhaps the most thorough study of that aspect of the avant garde theatre with which Ionesco's work has been popularly associated, the Theatre of the Absurd, is contained in Martin Esslin's book, The Theatre of the Absurd, published in 1961. The title of the book associates the work of those dramatists whose work is examined in detail in it--Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugène Ionesco, and Jean Genet--with post World War II Existentialism in general and with the philosophy of Albert Camus in particular, as expounded in Camus' essay, The Myth of Sisyphus. Esslin believes that the hallmark of the attitude of the Theatre of the Absurd is

. . . its sense that the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been tested and found wanting, that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions. The decline of religious faith was masked until the end of the Second World War by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism, and various totalitarian fallacies.¹

¹Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1961), p. xix.

Esslin distinguishes the dictionary meaning of absurd from the philosophical:

But this [the dictionary] definition is not the sense in which Camus uses the word, and in which it is used when we speak of the Theatre of the Absurd. . . . Ionesco defined his understanding of the term as follows: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. . . . Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost: all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."¹

But, according to Esslin, it is not subject matter which distinguishes the Theatre of the Absurd from other examples of avant garde theatre:

A similar sense of the senselessness of life, of the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose, is also the theme of much of the work of dramatists like Giraudoux, Anouilh, Salacrou, Sartre, and Camus himself. Yet these writers differ from the dramatists of the Absurd in an important respect: They present their sense of the irrationality of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning, while the Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought. . . . the Theatre of the Absurd tries to achieve a unity between its basic assumptions and the form in which these are expressed.²

In relating the Theatre of the Absurd to a philosophical point of view, Absurdity, and in his remark regarding the mode through which the Theatre of the Absurd expresses that

¹Ibid., citing Eugène Ionesco, "Dans les Armes de la Ville," Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud-Jean-Louis Barrault, Paris, X (October, 1957).

²Ibid., pp. xix-xx.

view, Esslin has pointed to two of the critical approaches to understanding Eugène Ionesco's work, as well as that of the other Absurdists.

By his relating of the Theatre of the Absurd to Absurd philosophy, Esslin draws upon the matrix from which the works have sprung, that of the disillusioned, nihilistic, Western world, more specifically that of post World War II Paris. Thus he employs what he considers to be valuable of available extra-textual information in shedding light upon the question of what the plays mean. Esslin's remark that Absurd drama expresses ". . . its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought" can only have been derived from the study of the work itself, without necessary regard to extra-textual information.

Two other approaches to understanding the works of the Theatre of the Absurd employed by Esslin have been the comparison not only of the Absurdists to each other but to their contemporaries in the avant-garde theatre and an examination of the relevance of Absurd drama to the total history of the theatre, especially its comic element.

Esslin's book has been reviewed in some detail here because it typifies the methods that have been employed by most critics who have made lengthy studies of avant-garde

theatre--especially the Theatre of the Absurd, although of course, the specific purposes and points of emphasis of each critic have varied. Other works of special value in the preparation of this paper, for general background in modern theatre as well as interpretative studies of Ionesco, have employed approaches similar to Esslin's: Eugène Ionesco by Richard Coe, Four Playwrights and a Postscript by David Grossvogel, and Avant-Garde: The Experimental Theater in France by Leonard Pronko. Notes and Counter Notes: Writings on the Theatre by Eugène Ionesco was of great value not only for commentary by Ionesco through his collected essays, his speeches, and interviews with him, but also for numerous articles by French and British critics which originally appeared in French and English periodicals.

Virtually all critics of Eugène Ionesco's plays have accepted the view of Martin Esslin that Ionesco's work is philosophically related to the notion of Absurdity, that is, virtually all whose studies of Ionesco have attempted to state the meaning of the entire body of Ionesco's drama. Furthermore, a great many critics have seen in Ionesco's work evidence of surrealist, Dadaistic, and Cubist tendencies. David Grossvogel, for instance, has written,

The petulance of the subtitle [of The Bald Soprano] also suggests one of Ionesco's antecedents--surrealism, the 1920's expression of a periodic urge in French letters to assail existing forms. As defined by Andre Breton, surrealism is the refusal of an individual existence to submit to the posited limitations of

existence. . . . The destructive aspects of surrealism are inherited from Dada, the systematic subversion of all the forms of prior acceptance that has become sterile and irritating. . . .¹

and in The Observer Kenneth Tynan remarked,

He is stuck. . . in an earlier groove, the groove of cubism, which has fascinated him so much that he has begun to confuse ends and means.²

Further, in an interview with Edith Mora, the following exchange occurred:

Miss Mora: . . . you are, I believe, considered by the great surviving surrealists as the most successful practitioner or surrealism--Philippe Soupault told me this recently.

Ionesco: When he and Breton and Benjamin Peret saw my plays in 1952 and '53 they did indeed say to me, "That's what we wanted to do!"³

Ionesco, however, has repeatedly disassociated his work from any ideology or any artistic movement. Of the relationship between his work and that of conscious surrealists, he said, "But I have never belonged to their group, or to the neosurrealists, although the movement has interested me."⁴ Of ideological relationships to his work generally, he

¹David I. Grossvogel, Four Playwrights and a Post-script (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 50.

²Kenneth Tynan, "Ionesco and the Phantom," The Observer, London, July 6, 1958, in Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), p. 94.

³"Interview with Edith Mora," Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, p. 120.

⁴Ibid.

has said, "Now drama and ideology ought to move in two parallel lines; drama should never be its slave."¹ Indeed, even of Absurdity, Ionesco has made his disclaimer: ". . . it the Absurd is far too fashionable . . . everything that exists is logical, there is nothing absurd about it."²

That Ionesco has disassociated his work from viewpoints of any kind emphatically does not mean that such tendencies as critics have seen in his work are not present. In fact, it is a part of the intention of this study to prove that his plays are clearly related to the Absurd. His disclaimers do not actually deny the presence of such tendencies; rather they are indicative of what he believes to be a preferable way of looking at his plays. He believes that if his plays are didactic in any sense, if they contain a viewpoint, it is not revealed as a stated thesis. Rather the play is the thesis; or, to put it another way, the idea stands objectified in the play. In his speech inaugurating the Helsinki Debates on the Avant-Garde Theatre, Ionesco said, "A work of art is not devoid of ideas. Since it is life or the expression of life, ideas emanate from it: the work of art does not emanate from an ideology."³ On another occasion he wrote,

¹Ibid., p. 121.

²Ibid.

³"A Talk about the Avant-Garde," Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, p. 48.

When I declare, for example, that a work of art, a play in this context, should not be ideological, I certainly do not mean one ought not to find ideas or opinions in it. I simply believe it is not the opinions expressed in it that matter. What matters is the flesh and blood of these ideas, their incarnation, their passion and their life.¹

Although one may grant that the dramatist creates another life, the proposition that an indefinite number of lives might be so created must also be granted; and it is obvious that the kind of life the dramatist creates must come from a way of looking at the existing world. The cliché that art is not created in a vacuum is valid enough. Ionesco's way of looking at the existing world must finally be discovered through a detailed study of the plays themselves. However, if it can be shown, by reference to statements by the author, that he had taken a more positive position than perhaps he realized, such information from outside the plays may be valuable as a means of organizing an interior study of the plays. The playwright has inveighed against the bourgeois spirit with sufficient frequency that the reader of his writings and his recorded interviews may wonder whether this distaste for the bourgeois has not been an influence in his plays. A look at several of Ionesco's remarks in which he has used some variant of bourgeois will reveal that from the whole may be derived a

¹"Remarks on My Theatre and on the Remarks of Others," Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, p. 80.

fair definition of what Ionesco means by bourgeois.

The latter had asked me if I agreed with what he had written about some of my early plays, which he considered to be a criticism of the petite bourgeoisie. I replied that I was only partly in agreement with his statements. Indeed, there probably was in my plays some criticism of the petite bourgeoisie, but the petite bourgeoisie I had in mind was not a class belonging to any particular society, for the petit bourgeois was for me a type of being that exists in all societies, whether they be called revolutionary or reactionary; for me the petit bourgeois is just a man of slogans, who no longer thinks for himself but repeats the truths that others have imposed upon him, ready-made and therefore lifeless. In short the petit bourgeois is a manipulated man. I even thought this young anti-bourgeois critic might well be petit bourgeois himself.¹

I have thought it my duty on several occasions to insist on the two dangers threatening the life of the mind and of the theatre in particular: the mental sluggishness of the bourgeois on the one hand, and on the other the tyranny of political regimes and movements, in other words opposing manifestations of the bourgeois spirit. And by the bourgeois spirit I mean: conformism from above, from below, from the left and the right, bourgeois as well as socialist unreality, dried-up conventional systems. Unfortunately the worst bourgeois are often the anti-bourgeois bourgeois. And I wonder if art might not achieve that liberation, that re-apprenticeship to a free mind to which we are no longer accustomed, which we have forgotten, but whose loss is felt as much by those who believe themselves to be free without being so (being prevented by prejudice) as by those who believe they are not or cannot be free.²

The petit bourgeois is for me a man of fixed ideas, one who turns up at every period in every society: a conformist, a man who adopts the thought

¹Ibid., p. 66.

²Ibid., p. 82.

patterns (or the principal ideology) of whatever society he happens to belong to and stops asking questions.¹

Two aspects of the bourgeois are evident in Ionesco's definitions. One is the bourgeois man. He may be defined not by his class or by his adherence to any particular ideology. Rather he is a man who unthinkingly acquiesces in and conforms to ideas (of whatever nature) of others. A second aspect of Ionesco's definition of bourgeois applies the term to the body of thought which makes up the ruling conventions by which the bourgeois man is manipulated and governed. It is, briefly, the bourgeois world.

Care has been taken in developing Ionesco's meaning of bourgeois because, as has been said earlier, this paper will undertake to reveal that it is this world and the bourgeois man's response to it which Ionesco's drama objectifies.

The method to be employed in this study was also indicated in the earlier statement of purpose. What Ionesco's drama objectifies can be revealed through a detailed study of the recurring motifs in the plays-- motifs which may be seen in the several elements of the drama: the setting and stage properties, the lighting, the characters, the dialogue, and the action.

¹"In the Long Run I Am for Classicism," Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, p. 131.

All critics of Ionesco's work--as it would seem they inescapably must, considering the overwhelming prominence of the motifs--have observed that certain kinds of motifs occur over and over again in his plays. Therefore, the employment of the motif as one means of revealing the meaning of Ionesco's plays is not new. What gives this study its individuality lies in its undertaking to demonstrate specifically the extent to which certain motifs recur, as other studies have not done, and its dependence upon the motif as the central and primary source material for deriving the thematic content of the total body of Ionesco's drama.

The search for meaning in literature through the examination of prevailing motifs is well established. An outstanding example of this approach is Caroline Spurgeon's Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us. Miss Spurgeon began by collecting all of the images of all of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets. By classifying the images according to the subjects with which they dealt, she was able to shed a great deal of light upon " (1) Shakespeare's personality, temperament and thought, and (2) on the themes and characters of the plays."¹ The reading of Miss Spurgeon's book furnished the inspiration for the method that

¹Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us (Boston: Beacon Press, 1935), p. ix.

is to be used in this study, although major modifications of her method were felt advisable.

One obvious reason for severely modifying the Spurgeon approach is that the scope and intent of this study is far more modest. A second reason inheres in the difference in the kind of literature to be analyzed. Miss Spurgeon was dealing with literature characterized by vast numbers of poetic images, by which she meant ". . . every kind of simile, as well as every kind of what is really compressed simile--metaphor."¹ Ionesco's drama contains few images of this nature, so that the examination of poetic imagery seemed likely to yield little. What Miss Spurgeon saw as the primary value of her collection of images was the principle which was to determine a primary modification of her method in this study:

There is no question but that the most striking function of the imagery as background and undertone in Shakespeare's art is the part played by recurrent images in raising and sustaining emotion, in providing atmosphere or in emphasizing a theme.²

The recurrent image, then, forms the motif. In summarizing her work Miss Spurgeon further clarifies the meaning of motif: ". . . I have now traced the recurring images which serve as 'motifs' in the play."³ The meaning of motif need

¹Ibid., p. 5.

²Ibid., p. 213.

³Ibid., p. 354.

not be limited to the recurrence of poetic images, however. M. H. Abrams defines a motif as a ". . . term now applied to recurrent character, incident, or concept in folklore or in literature,"¹ and Duffy and Pettit state that it is the "Recurrence of an idea, image, or literary device emphasizing something about the theme of a piece of literature."² From these definitions one can infer that motif is a term of quite general application. As it is used in this study, motif will be understood to mean a recurrent pattern of any kind. The motif may be established through recurrent character types, settings, actions, phrases, or whatever there is in the drama that creates a discernible pattern.

Proceeding from the premise that it is essentially the motif itself rather than the rhetorical constructions--image, metaphor, or other--from which it is made that is important in arriving at meaning, this study will establish motifs from whatever recurrences in the drama appear to form patterns of significance.

The purpose of this thesis will be achieved through the following organization: Chapter II, "Physical and Temporal Properties of the Bourgeois World," will reveal the

¹M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1957), p. 53.

²Charles Duffy, and Henry Pettit, A Dictionary of Literary Terms (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1952), p. 79.

bourgeois world encountered by the characters of the plays. Chapter III, "Behavioral Motifs," will reveal recurring patterns of behavior of the inhabitants of Ionesco's dramatic world. Chapter IV, "The Bourgeois Mentality Revealed," will interpret the motifs, showing how they combine to objectify the bourgeois mentality. Chapter V, "Anguish and Absurdity," will account for the anguish of the characters, showing the relationship of their anguish to the philosophical concept of Absurdity as expounded in Albert Camus' Myth of Sisyphus. Chapter VI, "Summary," will summarize the methods and results of this study.

CHAPTER II

PHYSICAL AND TEMPORAL PROPERTIES OF THE BOURGEOIS WORLD

The "world" of a piece of dramatic literature may be thought of as consisting of the total milieu, physical and non-physical, which exists within the boundaries of the play. The purpose of this chapter is to present the world which is encountered by the persons of the drama as it is revealed through stage directions and, occasionally, dialogue. Obviously settings will be of paramount importance in revealing the world of the drama. In addition to settings, recurring image patterns of time, death, and fantastic physical phenomena establish other motifs which are also much in evidence in Ionesco's plays as aspects of the world in which the characters find themselves.

I. THE SETTINGS

The settings for Ionesco's plays are frequently of the kind that are popularly associated with the petite bourgeoisie. Although Ionesco has said that his conception of the bourgeois did not involve a particular social class, that he has employed an aspect of the human environment that is commonly thought of as class-related as a starting point

in projecting his more important conception of the bourgeois upon the stage seems apparent.

The view that these settings are to be considered only as a starting point perhaps should be emphasized, since it may appear contradictory to point out that Ionesco did not wish to relate bourgeois to its traditional class-oriented meaning and then proceed to show the extent to which settings really are bourgeois in this traditional sense. The effect of having the action occur within a traditionally bourgeois physical framework is preparatory in the sense that such settings evoke an aura which prepares for the bourgeois world as defined by Ionesco--the world of mental attitudes which create and uphold the ruling conventions.

The first of Ionesco's plays to be staged was "The Bald Soprano."¹ The author's stage direction explicitly establishes that the setting is bourgeois: "A middle-class English interior, with English armchairs. An English evening. Mr. Smith, an Englishman, seated in his English armchair and wearing English slippers, is smoking his English pipe and reading an English newspaper, near an English fire."²

¹All plays discussed in this thesis are listed in the appendix with the date and place of first performance and the original French title.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The Bald Soprano," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 8.

Although Ionesco does not state that the interior of "The Lesson" is middle-class or bourgeois, the comfortable commonplaces called for in his stage direction suggest that such a feeling will be evoked by the setting and stage properties:

The office of the old professor, which also serves as a dining room. To the left, a door opens onto the apartment stairs; upstage, to the right, another door opens onto a corridor of the apartment. Upstage, a little left of center, a window, not very large, with plain curtains; on the outside sill of the windows are ordinary potted plants. The low buildings with red roofs of a small town can be seen in the distance. The sky is grayish-blue. On the right stands a provincial buffet. The table doubles as a desk, it stands at stage center. There are three chairs around the table, and two more stand on each side of the window. Light-colored wallpaper, some shelves with books.¹

The first stage directions in the text of "Victims of Duty" indicate that the details are largely to be left to the director, but the directions again explicitly require that the setting be petit bourgeois: "Set: A petit bourgeois interior. Choubert is sitting in an armchair near the table reading a newspaper. Madeleine, his wife, is sitting at the table darning socks."²

The stage directions for "Amédée or How to Get Rid of It" suggest a room with typical if spare and somewhat-the-worse-for-wear bourgeois furnishings. There is a "large

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Lesson," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 44.

²Eugène Ionesco, "Victims of Duty," Three Plays: Amédée, The New Tenant, Victims of Duty, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 117.

window with closed shutters backstage center, a table strewn with notebooks and pencils, and an armchair."¹ While Ionesco's description of Amédée is not specifically relevant to the kind of setting which a director should strive for, it would likely be suggestive to him: "As the curtain rises, Amédée Buccinioni. . . a petit bourgeois. . . ." ²

A change of setting takes place for Act III of "Amédée." The physical qualities of this set do not create an aura suggestive of the environment where conformity and convention hold sway. The place is Little Torco Square, the street outside a brothel-bar named "Maison de Tolerance." Shadows of dancing figures can be seen through the curtained windows of the bar, and there is the sound of a jazz orchestra. The sign outside the bar is the most obvious suggestion that here is a place outside the ken of the bourgeoisie. The action which occurs at this site will prove that the sign outside the brothel-bar is ironic; nevertheless, the set itself is not one which evokes an aura of bourgeois standards of thought and behavior.

"The New Tenant" opens on an empty room. There is nothing about the room to suggest that there is anything extraordinary about it; it might be an unfurnished room in

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Amédée or How to Get Rid of It," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), pp. 3-4.

²Ibid., p. 4.

any ordinary apartment building. The stage properties, the furniture with which the stage is to be filled and stacked, more clearly associates the room with the bourgeois: small stools and vases at first, tables, lamps, etc., until the room is entirely filled and the new tenant blocked from the view of the audience.

The scene for Act I of "The Killer" is out-of-doors, the stage empty except for two garden chairs and a table; the grey light suggests a "dull November day or afternoon in February." In the background the noise of a tram is heard. Then the stage is suddenly lighted with a brilliant white light, and the sky becomes a vivid blue. The audience is to be given an impression of peacefulness. All this occurs before any characters have appeared.¹ With the possible exception of the tram in the background before the lighting has changed, there is little in this opening setting to relate the world of "The Killer" to the bourgeois concept.

The setting for the second act, however, is very positive in its emphasis upon the traditionally bourgeois. The place is the room of Berenger, the central character of "The Killer." The room is described in the stage directions as

Dark and low-ceilinged, but lighter in the centre

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Killer," The Killer and Other Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 9.

opposite the window. Near this long low window a chest. . . an armchair, French Regency style, . . . a large table. . . with notebooks and papers, a book, an inkstand and a fancy penholder like a goose-quill.

A red worn-out arm chair. . . an old writing-desk and a chest of drawers with a threadbare tapestry on the wall above it; . . . another red arm chair. . . a small¹ table, a footstool. . . an old gramophone. . . .¹

The setting again changes for the third act of the play. The scene is out-of-doors, and although the details of setting recommended by the author in the stage directions are few, they are relevant to the conception of bourgeois commonplace and convention:

A wide avenue in an outlying part of the town. At the back of the stage the view is masked by a raised pavement, a few yards wide, with a railing along the edge. Steps, also with a railing, leading up from street to pavement in full view of the audience. This short flight of stone steps should be like those in some of the old streets of Paris, such as the Rue Jean de Beauvais. . . . a long street in perspective with some buildings in the distance: the buildings of the Prefecture.²

The setting is such as one may suppose would not be unfamiliar to a French audience. ". . . like those in some of the old streets of Paris," suggests its commonplace nature. More significant is the symbol of authority (which Ionesco consistently identifies with bourgeois convention), the buildings of the Prefecture, seen in the distance.

¹Ibid., pp. 42-43.

²Ibid., p. 74.

In none of Ionesco's plays have settings been more clearly influential, both qualitatively and quantitatively, in manifesting the bourgeois aura than in "Rhinoceros." The scene of Act I is set in a square of a small provincial town. It could hardly be more typically bourgeois. There is a house upstage, the ground floor of which is a grocery and the upper story of which is the grocer's residence. "Epicerie" is boldly written above the window of the store. A second building houses a cafe on the ground floor and a residence in the upper story. There is a church steeple in the background, and a few moments before the curtain rises the sound of church bells is heard. The setting is a realistic one for the office workers, the housewife, the grocer, and other bourgeoisie who will soon enter.

The first scene of Act II in "Rhinoceros" presents the physical environment of authority. Ionesco is indifferent whether the office to be represented by the setting is a government office or one of a private concern, ". . . such as a large firm of law publications."¹ A notice above the door reads, "Chef du Service." There are the usual furnishings and equipment of an office, and on the walls rows of books and dusty documents. Signs on the walls read:

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Rhinoceros," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 38.

"Jurisprudence," "Codes," "Le Journal Officiel," and "Lois Fiscales." All indications are that this is an appropriate setting for guardians of the status quo.

The setting for the second scene of Act II in "Rhinoceros" is the room of one of the two central characters, as is the setting for Act III. The stage directions point out that these rooms bear a striking resemblance to one another; they also bear, with insignificant differences in detail, much resemblance to the residential settings of other Ionesco plays that have been described earlier. These settings, too, then, contribute to the feeling that Ionesco's is a bourgeois world.

The thirteen plays by Ionesco that are the subject of this study contain nineteen stage settings. Of these nineteen settings, eleven appear to be clearly bourgeois in the class-oriented definition of the word.

The settings for "Jack, or the Submission" and its sequel, "The Future Is in Eggs," which are the same except for the addition of a hatching apparatus in "The Future Is in Eggs" and the substitution of a portrait of Grandfather Jack for the picture in "Jack" which "expresses nothing," were not counted with the bourgeois because the settings are such that they are representative of poverty rather than bourgeois comfort and because they contain the unconventional "picture expressing nothing" and the "long table or a

kind of divan" which is to be a hatching apparatus. So far as bourgeois content is concerned, the sets of some of the plays were neutral. There are no stage directions regarding the set of "The Leader" so that its setting obviously could not be counted among the bourgeois. A reading of the play suggests that the stage would be entirely devoid of furniture and that lighting effects would be a matter of the director's discretion. The second of the "neutral" plays, "Maid to Marry," has only the direction that the two characters who first appear on stage are sitting on a bench in a public park. The set of a third "neutral" play, "Improvisation, or The Shepherd's Chameleon," was also not counted as bourgeois because of insufficient evidence. Only a table covered with books is required by the stage direction.

Whether or not the setting for "The Chairs" is such that it should be counted among the bourgeois is debatable. It is decidedly unconventional with its circular walls, its ten doors, and its thirty-five chairs; on the other hand, the dais and blackboard appear to suggest authority, authority implying a force which upholds conventional mental attitudes. The decision not to include this setting with those clearly depicting the bourgeois was based upon a consideration of which of the opposing aspects of the set would create the stronger impression upon the audience. In the

absence of stage directions to light or color the dais and blackboard in some way that would give them great prominence, the visual impression created by the circular walls and the thirty-five chairs would undoubtedly be much stronger than the impression created by the dais and blackboard, since the latter are, after all, only a detail of the whole set.

A member of a theatre audience would unlikely receive an impression that the bourgeois setting for a one-act Ionesco play might have special significance. If an evening's program were to include three Ionesco one-acts, however--for instance, "The Bald Soprano," "The Lesson," and "The New Tenant"--the theatre-goer might well notice the repeated use of the petit bourgeois setting and speculate whether there might not be significance in this. A viewing of a longer play such as "Rhinoceros," in which all of the four scenes have settings of this kind, might also initiate similar speculation. A reader of all of Ionesco's plays who was oriented to consider a play in respect to all of its dramatic elements, including settings, must certainly see that a pattern recurs, forming a visual motif that must be evaluated in terms of what the whole of the playwright's work may be saying.

II. TIME

While the stage world may begin with the set, as the play progresses other aspects of the playwright's art cause

it to mutate and grow in complexity. In Ionesco's dramatic world the motifs of time, death, and assorted bizarre phenomena have much to do with the development of the total atmosphere of that world.

Many recurrences of time imagery, all of which cannot be enumerated here, combine to develop a distinctly temporal motif in "The Bald Soprano." The stage directions which set the opening scene contain the first instance: The English clock strikes 17 English strokes." This is Mrs. Smith's cue to remark that it is nine o'clock.¹ She later maintains, when the fireman inquires for the time of day, that, "We don't have the time, here. . . . It [the clock] runs badly. It is contradictory, and always indicates the opposite of what the hour really is."² The same clock again strikes twenty-nine times during the scene in which Mr. and Mrs. Martin are in the process of discovering one another.

From hour of the day, confusion about time enlarges--although not in this order--to confusion of the days of the week, to confusion of years, to confusion of historical periods. According to Mr. Smith, commercial travelers rest three days a week, on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Tuesdays,³ and the question of whether Bobby Watson died a year and a half

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Bald Soprano," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), pp. 8-9.

²Ibid., p. 34.

³Ibid., p. 13.

ago, two years ago, three years ago, or four years ago is left unanswered.¹ Historical anachronisms occur in rapid succession. In search of a fire, the Fire Chief is advised by Mr. Martin that he might go to see the Vicar of Wakefield, but the Chief demurs. Clergymen it seems ". . . extinguish their fires themselves, or else they have them put out by vestal virgins."² These specific recurrences of time imagery form a motif of time confusion which is re-enforced by the structure of the play. At the play's conclusion, the lights go out momentarily; when they come on again the play begins again, the Martins assuming the parts played by Mr. and Mrs. Smith and speaking the same lines with which the play opened, while the curtain slowly descends.

A clock occupies an even more important place in the household of Amédée than it does in that of the Smiths in "The Bald Soprano." Attention is repeatedly called to time through the continual visible movement of the clock's hands and through frequent direct references to the time of day by Amédée and Madeleine, his wife. The growing corpse in the bedroom, whose body little by little emerges into the dining room, and the growing toadstools in the dining room also call the reader's attention to the passage of time. The connection between the passage of time and the growth of the

¹Ibid., pp. 11-12.

²Ibid., pp. 28-29.

corpse is made explicit: "The audience should still be able to see its hands, moving slowly at the same speed as the dead man's feet."¹ There are also references to time as the characters review their lives together and in such speeches as Madeleine's when she alludes to their having kept the corpse for fifteen years--a corpse they now wish to be rid of:

Madeleine: . . . What's it matter. . . It should have been done long ago. . . we'll have to wait a little longer, until this evening. . . we've waited for fifteen years. . . what are a few hours more? Oh, dear, I'm so used to waiting, waiting, long uncomfortable years of waiting, that's what my life has been. . .²

In "The Chairs" there is the suggestion that the whole of the play takes place in the future, for the Old Man informs his wife that Paris ". . . has been extinguished, extinguished for four hundred thousand years. . ."³ The very ages of the Old Man (ninety-five) and the Old Woman (ninety-four) underscore the time motif in this play as do numerous references to their past lives.

Richard Coe calls attention to the dialogue in "Maid

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Amédée or How to Get Rid of It," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 42.

²Ibid., p. 41.

³Eugène Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 116.

to Marry" in which the mother refers to her daughter of ninety-three who is really thirteen because the daughter owes the mother eighty years,¹ and to Berenger of "The Killer" who says, "I could be sixty, seventy, eighty, a hundred and twenty, how do I know?"² Coe's reference to "Maid to Marry" is reminiscent of other plays in which role confusion involves a time concept when characters like those in "The Chairs," "Victims of Duty," and "Jack" assume roles younger or older than the age established previously in the play.

The most consistent factor that can be noted about the dimension of time in Ionesco's plays is that what one has come to accept as the normal continuum has been destroyed. If the time is nine o'clock when the Smiths' clock strikes seventeen times, if Tuesdays come twice a week, if time is measurable by the rate of a corpse's growth, if a man of ninety-five can weep for his mother on the lap of his wife-mother, if a daughter of thirteen is thought by her mother to be ninety-three, then perhaps it is as Berenger says in "The Killer," "Time is above all subjective."³

¹Richard N. Coe, Eugène Ionesco (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), p. 33, quoted from "La Jeune Fille a marier," Theatre, in collection "N.R.F." (Paris: Gallimard, 1954 and 1958), Vol. II, pp. 255-256.

²Ibid., quoted from "Tuer sans Gages," Theatre, in collection "N.R.F." (Paris: Gallimard, 1954 and 1958), Vol. II, p. 69.

³Eugène Ionesco, "The Killer," The Killer and Other Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 15.

III. DEATH

Recurrent images of death are to be seen and heard in all of the plays with the exception of the three brief sketches, "Maid to Marry," "Improvisation," and "The Leader." While in some of the plays, the death factor enters the Ionesco world in a way that is more or less casual, or suggestive, rather than explicit, nevertheless its presence in all of the more important plays to some degree does point to the formation of a motif which needs to be considered.

Death is anything but pervasive in "The Bald Soprano"--the traditional atmosphere which accompanies death in literature which intends to deal with death as a control theme is missing altogether. In this play death is present only in the amusing context of the Bobby Watson exchange between Mr. and Mrs. Smith. But the fact is that Bobby Watson is dead and his death is discussed.

The motif of death is clearly shown in "The Lesson," for the killing of the pupil by the professor is the climatic moment of a gradually changing relationship between these two central characters. The motif must be seen as the more important because the young pupil is the fortieth of the professor's pupils to meet death at his hands.

In "Jack" and its sequel, "The Future Is In the Eggs," the death motif again recurs. In the first of these two plays, the motif is injected through the poetic imagery of Roberta II as she attempts to seduce Jack: "I am the gaiety

of death in life. . . the joy of living, of dying."¹ As rapport is established between Roberta II and Jack, she offers to entertain him with stories, bizarre stories of death, like that of the weak-eyed miller who, intending to drown unwanted puppies, drowned his own child instead and, in the madness of grief at his error, then killed his wife and hanged himself. Other stories that Roberta II tells involve the smothering of a dog in a marsh and the death by fire of a horse. "The Future Is in Eggs" draws in the death motif in the demise of Grandfather-Jacques. Grandfather-Jacques steps out of his portrait in order to tell the story of his death, but, in a fit of pique because he is not permitted to sing, again returns to the frame--glowering and dead.

Although the old couple in "The Chairs" commit suicide at the conclusion of the play, death is really more strongly suggested throughout the preceding mass of the play because of the reader's awareness of the imminence of death that the couples' ages--ninety-four and ninety-five--imply, and because of light and dark imagery. The play begins in half-light, and when the Old Woman lights the gas lamp, it sheds green light which one can imagine casts an unhealthy, death-like pallor over the faces of the two characters. The suggestion of the nearness of death is also present in the early

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Jack or the Submission," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 101.

speeches of the play:

Old Man: I want to see--the boats on the water
making blots in the sunlight.

Old Woman: You can't see them, there's no sunlight,
it's nighttime, my darling.¹

A moment later the Old Man remarks that it is dark although only six o'clock in the evening, whereas in the past daylight remained until midnight. Lighting effects again come into play in the final scene after the old couple have leaped out of the window. The stage direction reads, "The light coming through the main door and the windows has disappeared; there remains only a weak light as at the beginning of the play; the darkened windows remain wide open, their curtains floating on the wind."² Just before the curtain falls the stage is left empty of people for a moment so that attention is focused upon the main door of the set, which is ". . . wide open onto darkness."³ The concern of the old couple, that the Old Man's message to mankind must be communicated before he dies, heightens awareness of the imminence of death.

In that section of "Victims of Duty" where Madeleine becomes an old woman, Choubert, her husband, laments the passing of youth and the death of the friends of their youth: "Poor old lady, poor little faded doll. . . . This morning our path was strewn with flowers. . . . Nobody had died and

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 113.

²Ibid., p. 159.

³Ibid., p. 160.

you'd never shed a tear. . . . When our youth has flown, our tears are the pure water of the wells. . . the wells of life, of immortality. . . ."¹ Death is immediate, however, in the last moment of the play, when Choubert's persecutor, the detective, is stabbed to death.

Death is given a spatial dimension in "Amédée" in the presence of a growing corpse which may be that of Madeleine's lover whom Amédée may have killed fifteen years before. So dominant is the presence of death that the entire dialogue and action of the play are concentrated on "how to get rid of it," for the corpse threatens to destroy the household and lives of those with whom it has been "living." The whole of the apartment is given a tomb-like atmosphere because of the imagery of pollution found in the play. Of the mushrooms which are made to grow in profusion before the eyes of the audience, Amédée says, ". . . Well really! If they're going to start growing in the dining room! . . . Poisonous, of course!"² As night falls in Act II, the set grows dark; then, from the bedroom where the corpse is, a strange green light is cast onto the stage so that the effect of an unhealthy pallor not unlike that produced in "The Chairs" must result.

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Victims of Duty," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), pp. 130-131.

²Eugène Ionesco, "Amédée or How to Get Rid of It," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 4.

The light comes from the eyes of the dead man; Amédée has forgotten to close them. Of the corpse Madeleine says, "It's his world, not ours."¹

In "The New Tenant" the audience witnesses a scene that is tantamount to the burial of the new tenant as his possessions are moved into the flat. The stage is entirely filled with furniture, the tenant seated center-stage blocked from the view of the audience by furniture that has completely enclosed him. The suspicion that one has witnessed the interment of one dead is confirmed when one of the moving men reaches down from a ladder to throw flowers within the enclosure of furniture that surrounds the tenant. The image is completed by stage directions and the final speech of the tenant: "(after a silence; not a movement on the stage) Put out the light. (Utter darkness.) Thank you."² With that the curtain falls on "The New Tenant."

The very title of the play foreshadows the importance of the death motif in "The Killer." The action of the drama here depends upon the efforts of the central character, Berenger, to locate and have arrested a man who seems to kill senselessly--perhaps for the sake of the act of killing itself. "The Radiant City," a section of the metropolis in which Berenger lives, would be utopian except that some of

¹Ibid., p. 53.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The New Tenant," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 116.

its residents are daily found dead in a beautiful pool that decorates the landscape of the Radiant City. When Berenger finally encounters the killer, he too is murdered for no apparent reason.

Aside from the trampling of a cat by a rhinoceros, death is not explicitly a part of the world of "Rhinoceros." One by one, however the characters of the play turn into rhinoceroses, until at the end, Berenger, the central character here as in "The Killer," is the only human being left on Earth. If the metamorphosis of humanity into rhinoceroses can be interpreted as the death of humanity, then the motif of death is an important one in this play.

The fact that death recurs so regularly in Ionesco's drama suggests that in this respect, at least--however amusing his plays may be, or however far beyond the world of actual experience many of his readers may feel them to be--a motif has been established that identifies them with a traditional concern of literature. That concern is the ever-presence of death.

IV. FANTASTIC PHYSICAL PHENOMENA

Certain kinds of phenomena that characterize Ionesco's world refuse to be categorized so conveniently as those of time and death. They appear to form a motif that is something apart from those that have been discussed to

this point, for they do not belong to the commonplace settings; they are not intrinsic to the fact of death, nor are they intrinsically temporal in character. For want of a more exact term, these occurrences--which seem to suggest that virtually anything is possible in Ionesco's world--may be termed "fantastic physical phenomena." These phenomena are differentiated from the kind of phenomena which will be discussed in the second section of this chapter by their being phenomena over which persons of the drama have no control. Thus they are a part of the world as the characters encounter it--they constitute the world to which the characters respond rather than the world which the characters form by choice of action.

All of the fantastic physical phenomena which are a part of the milieu in which Ionesco's characters find themselves cannot be mentioned; but a sufficient number of examples can be supplied, so that some idea of the extent to which the reader's conception of the possible is destroyed can be ascertained.

An incident like that in "The Bald Soprano" in which a doorbell rings although no one is at the door may be strange, but it is hardly fantastic--as any householder can testify. On the other hand, the presence on stage of several dozen persons, none of whom is visible, is fantastic indeed. Such is the case in "The Chairs," whose invisible characters are not to be taken as figments of the imaginations of the

Old Man and the Old Woman:

We hear for the first time the human noises of the invisible crowd; these are bursts of laughter, murmurs, shh's, ironical coughs; weak at the beginning, these noises grow louder, then, again progressively they become weaker. All this should last long enough for the audience--the real and visible audience--to leave with this ending firmly impressed on its mind. . . .¹

Other physical phenomena which join to create a motif of the fantastic are the appearance of a young woman who has first two noses and then three in "Jack"; the grandfather in "Eggs" who dies, returns to life from behind his own portrait, and then returns to the portrait, dead again; the chalk circle in "The New Tenant" over which the moving men stumble or upon which they bark their shins; the appearance of a rhinoceros and the subsequent metamorphosis of people into rhinoceroses in "Rhinoceros"; the corpse in "Amédée" which may be observed growing upon the stage and which finally becomes a "balloon" which carries Amédée off into the skies; and the capacity of Roberta in "The Future Is in Eggs" to lay basket upon basket of eggs.

Beginning with the motif of the deceptively commonplace bourgeois setting, readers of Ionesco see manifested a world in which neither time nor natural phenomena are governed by a discernible logic of any kind. The ever-presence of death, like the bourgeois settings, gives that

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 160.

world at least that much of what is recognizable and "real," morbid though even the reality may be, bathed in rays of sickly grey or green light. This world is one which Leonard Pronko has described as ". . . strange and nightmarish, but at the same time familiar, for it is our own little world, and the grotesque figures moving upon the stage remind us of ourselves."¹ Only to a limited extent has the truth of Pronko's statement been demonstrated thus far in this study. The grotesque figures and their reaction to the milieu in which they find themselves, the subject of the next chapter, will perhaps show more clearly why "it is our own little world," and why those figures remind us of ourselves.

¹Leonard Cabell Pronko, Avant-Garde: The Experimental Theater in France (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 61.

CHAPTER III

BEHAVIORAL MOTIFS

What is most important to Ionesco in his definition of the bourgeois is made very clear in a passage from his writing previously quoted:

The petit bourgeois is for me a man of fixed ideas, one who turns up at every period in every society: a conformist, a man who adopts the thought patterns (or the principal ideology) of whatever society he happens to belong to and stops asking questions.¹

Richard Coe adds: ". . . even the possession of a logical or quasi-logical ideology is in itself bourgeois in Ionesco's use of the term."² The conceptual content of a play must, of course, begin with a study of the characters and how they behave in their stage world. Once behavior patterns have been delineated, the foundation will have been laid for their analysis in Chapter IV, which establishes the characteristics of the bourgeois mentality--the facet of the bourgeois with which Ionesco was most seriously concerned.

Because they occur in almost overwhelming plenitude, no attempt has been made to show all of the motifs of all of

¹"In the Long Run I Am for Classicism," Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), p. 131.

²Richard N. Coe, Eugène Ionesco (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), p. 12.

the plays. An additional difficulty in attempting to be exhaustive in treating the motifs lies in the density of the language of the plays, one aspect of which is the fact that three or four motifs sometimes reside in a single speech. Further, a great deal of unnecessary and tedious repetition would inevitably result from such an attempt at exhaustiveness. The limiting principle has been a simple one: to present recurrences in sufficient numbers to prove that they do indeed establish motifs of significance in Ionesco's work.

I. CONFUSED IDENTITY

One facet of Ionesco's world is prominent to both the viewer and the reader of his plays: its occupants often appear to be confused about identity, sometimes their own, sometimes that of other persons.

"The Bald Soprano" contains a variety of identification confusions. Perhaps the most famous example is the Bobby Watson tour de force. The reference to Bobby Watson is natural and casual at first. As the bourgeois English couple, the Smiths, sit before their English fire, he reading his English newspaper and she darning a basket of English socks, Mr. Smith remarks that Watson has died. Enter confusion of several varieties, but the Watson confusion results from there being numerous Watsons called Bobby, all known to the Smiths, and all a part of the same clan. The illustrative

passage quoted below begins with a discussion of the deceased's wife, Bobby Watson:

Mr. Smith: She's still young. She might very well remarry. She looks so well in mourning.

Mrs. Smith: But who would take care of the children? You know very well they have a boy and a girl. What are their names?

Mr. Smith: Bobby and Bobby like their parents. Bobby Watson's uncle, old Bobby Watson, is a rich man and very fond of the boy. He might very well pay for Bobby's education.

Mrs. Smith: That would be proper. And Bobby Watson's aunt, old Bobby Watson, might very well, in her turn, pay for the education of Bobby Watson, Bobby Watson's daughter. That way Bobby, Bobby Watson's mother, could remarry. Has she anyone in mind?

Mr. Smith: Yes, a cousin of Bobby Watson's.

Mrs. Smith: Who? Bobby Watson?

Mr. Smith: Which Bobby Watson do you mean?

Mrs. Smith: Why, Bobby Watson, the son of old Bobby Watson, the late Bobby Watson's other uncle.

Mr. Smith: No, it's not that one, it's someone else. It's Bobby Watson, the son of old Bobby Watson, the late Bobby Watson's aunt.

Mrs. Smith: Are you referring to Bobby Watson the commercial traveler?

Mr. Smith: All the Bobby Watsons are commercial travelers.¹

The device of giving the same, or very nearly the same, name to several characters is a favorite one of Ionesco's but it does not result in a confusion of identity in other plays since the characters so named appear on stage and do not repeatedly refer to one another by name. The use of like names for several characters is not without suggestive value, nevertheless. The characters of one family in "Jack, or the

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Bald Soprano," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), pp. 11-12.

Submission" are Jack, Jacqueline, Father Jack, Mother Jack, Grandfather Jack, and Grandmother Jack; characters of the other family are Roberta I, Roberta II, Father Robert, and Mother Robert. The same characters, except for Roberta I, appear in the sequel to "Jack," "The Future Is in Eggs." In addition to Ionesco himself and a maid or concierge, Marie, the three characters who appear in "Improvisation or The Shepherd's Chameleon" are Bartholomeus I, II, and III. While it is too early to offer a conclusion concerning the repeated names in these plays, one may suppose that the mental habit of attributing like characteristics to things with like names would be transferred to the dramatic context. Almost certainly this would occur in "Improvisation," where the three Bartolomeuses all wear academic gowns.

A second instance of confused identity occurs in "The Bald Soprano" with the entrance of the Smiths' evening guests, Mr. and Mrs. Martin. Mr. and Mrs. Martin do not know one another:

Mr. Martin: Excuse me, madam, but it seems to me, unless I'm mistaken, that I've met you somewhere before.

Mrs. Martin: I, too, sir. It seems to me that I've met you somewhere before.

Mr. Martin: Was it, by any chance, at Manchester that I caught a glimpse of you, madam?

Mrs. Martin: That is very possible. I am originally from the city of Manchester. But I do not have a good memory, sir. I cannot say whether it was there that I caught a glimpse of you or not.

Mr. Martin: Good God, that's curious! I, too, am originally from the city of Manchester, madam!

Mrs. Martin: That is curious!

Mr. Martin: Isn't that curious! Only, I, madam, I left the city of Manchester about five weeks ago.

Mrs. Martin: That is curious! What a bizarre coincidence! I, too, sir, I left the city of Manchester about five weeks ago.

Mr. Martin: Madam, I took the 8:30 morning train which arrives in London at 4:45.¹

Three pages of similar dialogue later, having discovered that they apparently occupy the same bed, the Martins decide that it was perhaps there that they met. What at last convinces them that they are married and have, in melodramatic style, found each other at last, is the discovery that each has a pretty two-year old blonde child named Alice, who has one white eye and one red eye. After the Martins fall asleep in an easy chair, clasped in each other's arms, however, the maid, Mary, informs the audience that Elizabeth (Mrs. Martin) is not Elizabeth and Donald (Mr. Martin) is not Donald. Mary's proof is that ". . . Donald's daughter has one white eye and one red eye like Elizabeth's daughter. Whereas Donald's child has a white right eye and a red left eye, Elizabeth's child has a red right eye and a white left!"² Thus the logical deduction through which the Martins identify one another is "proved" false because, ironically, of a second instance of confused identity. But the confused-identity motif has not yet run its course! At the end of her

¹Ibid., p. 17.

²Ibid., p. 19.

Elizabeth-in-not-Elizabeth-and-Donald-is-not-Donald speech, Mary confides to the audience, "My real name is Sherlock Holmes," and exits.

The scene-setting stage direction at the beginning of Act III of "The Killer" attests to the presence of the confused-identity motif in this play: "On the raised part of the stage, near the railing, is Mother Peep, a fat soul resembling the Concierge of Act II." A moment later, Mother Peep is seen by the central character of the play, Berenger, who is accompanied by his friend, Edouard: Mother Peep is haranguing a crowd of people at a political rally:

Berenger: Looks like my concierge.

Edouard: You're seeing things. She's a politician, Mother Peep. . .

Berenger: The name sounds familiar, but I've no time to listen.¹

II. ROLE CONFUSION

Very closely related to the confused identity motif is a recurrence which may be termed "role confusion." In this kind of recurrent action, characters shift attitude or point of view so that their relationship to other persons of the drama or to a whole situation is not that which has been established earlier in the play. Thus a husband-wife relationship might shift to that of child-mother.

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Killer," The Killer and Other Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), pp. 74-76.

Just such a shift in roles occurs in "The Chairs;" rather, the expected relationship between the couple, an Old Man of ninety-five and an Old Woman of ninety-four has already been distorted when the play opens. As the play progresses, the relationship "normalizes" if only temporarily. At the beginning of the play, according to the stage directions, the Old Woman holds the Old Man on her lap and caresses him as if he were a child:

Old Woman: Perhaps you've spoiled your career?

Old Man: (weeping suddenly) I've spoiled it? I've spilled it? Ah! where are you, Mamma, Mamma, where are you, Mamma? . . . hi, hi, hi, I'm an orphan. (He moans.) . . . an orphan, dworfan.

Old Woman: Here I am, what are you afraid of?

Old Man: No, Semiramis, my sweetheart, you're not my mamma. . . orphan, dworfan, who will protect me?¹

Later in the play as the awaited guests arrive, the Old Man and the Old Woman greet them and talk to them--invisible though they are--at first in conventional fashion. Then the ninety-four-year-old woman begins to make advances to the "Photoengraver"; she is flirtatious at first and then, according to the stage-directions, she ". . . exposes her old breast; then, her hands on her hips, throws her head back, makes erotic cries, projects her pelvis, her legs spread apart; she laughs like an old prostitute. . . ." ² Meanwhile the Old

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 117.

²Ibid., p. 132.

Man's role has changed quite as drastically. Romantically, he speaks to another invisible guest: "Will you be my Isolde, and let me be your Tristan?"¹

Several instances of role confusion are to be found in "Victims of Duty." Madeleine begins as the clothes-darning petit bourgeois housewife of Choubert; she then becomes a young woman wearing a low-cut gown, who entices him; then a mournful, very old woman--Choubert's wife grown old; then the young woman again; then the mother of Choubert; then a member of a theatre audience; then a beggarwoman; and finally the bourgeois figure that she was at the beginning of the play. Choubert undergoes such transformations as are necessary to play roles complementary to those of Madeleine's just described. Also, the role of the detective, who is stuffing Choubert's mouth with bread in order to fill the gaps in his memory, is assumed by Nicolas D' Eu. Nicolas kills the detective and takes over the detective's Choubert-stuffing task.

Whereas the role confusion in "Victims of Duty" is very complex, that in "Maid to Marry" is simple and direct. A Gentleman and Lady converse on a park bench. The conversation turns to the Lady's well-educated, model daughter, for whom she seeks a good husband. When the daughter appears, she is ". . . a man, about thirty years old, robust

¹Ibid., p. 133.

and virile, with a bushy black moustache, wearing a grey suit." Says the Gentleman, "She's the spitting image of you, Madame."¹

"The Future Is in Eggs" illustrates role confusion when Roberta is pressed by her family to fulfill her reproductive role. To aid her progress Grandmother-Jacques offers to sing her a lullaby. Another instance occurs when Roberta assumes extravagantly suggestive sexual attitudes toward Jacques; he ". . . makes a vague gesture with his arms towards her, pulls a grimace like a child who wants to cry, saying: 'Mm. . . Mm. . . Mm. . .'"²

III. LIFE-DEATH CONFUSION

The motif of confusion about who one is and what one's role should be in the bourgeois world is objectified through the sample recurrences cited. If the individual is frequently confused about his or others' identity and what his role should be, he is also confused about what distinctions between the states of life and death are valid. Of Bobby Watson, for instance, the Smiths believe that his body remained

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Maid to Marry," The Killer and Other Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 158.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The Future Is in Eggs," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 132.

warm four years after his death, and the Old Woman in "The Chairs" tells her husband that expressing one's self is ". . . easy once you begin, like life and death. . . it's enough to have your mind made up,"¹ implying, through the casual coupling of the two states of being together, that she has experienced both and that there is little difference between the two.

The motif of confusion about life and death is often comic as it is in "The Future Is in Eggs" when Father-Jacques tells Jack, "Here comes your grandfather, fit as a fiddle, to tell you how he met his death,"² and when Grandmother-Jacques tells the returned Grandfather-Jacques, "You're not going to start singing again. . . You're dead. You're in mourning."³

In "Amédée" many instances might be cited that indicate a motif of confusion about the states of life and death. The principle phenomenon of the entire play of course suggests that the distinction between life and death is not clear, for the corpse grows, projects light from its eyes, and emits a strange music. None of this is surprising to either Amédée or Madeleine, although the increasing size of the body is an

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 120.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The Future Is in Eggs," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 130.

³Ibid., p. 131.

inconvenience:

Amédée: He's grown again. Soon, the divan won't be big enough for him. His feet are over the end already. I seem to remember fifteen years ago he was rather short. And so young. Now he's got a great white beard. Twenty and fifteen, that only makes him thirty-five, after all. . . . He's not really old. . . .¹

Madeleine: The dead grow old faster than the living. Everyone knows that. . .

Although Madeleine makes a distinction between the living and the dead, neither she nor Amédée find it strange that properties normally associated with the living are also properties of the dead. The dead are capable even of emotions. Madeleine and Amédée believe that the corpse grows because it desires revenge:

Amédée: He may have forgiven us. I believe he has. Ah, if only we could be sure he'd forgiven us.

Madeleine: If he'd forgiven us, he'd have stopped growing. As he's still growing, he must still be feeling spiteful. He still has a grudge against us. The dead are terribly vindictive. The living forget much sooner.

Amédée: Dash it! They've got their whole lives in front of them! . . . Perhaps he's not as wicked as the others. . . .²

If the dead may grow old, of course, they may "grow up" as well. Trying to resolve Amédée's confusion about the identity

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Amédée or How to Get Rid of It," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 14.

²Ibid., p. 19.

of the corpse, which he speculates may even be that of a baby, Madeleine says: ". . . And why, if it did die, did we keep it here and let it grow up?"¹

The notion that there is little difference between life and death is shown through the remarks of the garrulous caretaker in "The New Tenant" as she speaks of the former occupants of the apartment: ". . . but there, they're away now, mustn't tell tales--just as though they was dead, not just the same p'raps, specially as it's all the same really"²

In "The Killer," a play which focuses primarily upon the subject of death, there is confusion on the part of Berenger about what action is appropriate in regard to death, but there is no problem in distinguishing the dead from the living.

IV. FALSE LOGIC

The confusion of Ionesco's characters about identity and role, life and death, does not necessarily show that their different apprehension of the world is the result of defective thinking. In many of his plays, however, it is the thought process itself which is apparently confused, and

¹Ibid., pp. 38-39.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The New Tenant," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 94.

the recurrence of instances in which characters can be shown making statements which are clearly illogical in themselves forms a motif somewhat distinct from these other kinds of confusion. This motif can be labeled "false logic."

The use of false logic by Ionesco's characters may be divided into two categories. In the first the character's logic is false despite his conscious attempts to express himself according to the tenets of good logical thought or despite his being a member of the intellectual community from whom one expects logic. In the second the character speaks illogically although he has made no special claim about being logical nor does he have the intellectual status which would imply that from his lips one can a priori expect statements that are models of good logic.

Statements from the professor in "The Lesson," from the academic critics in "Improvisation," from the Logician and his "student" in "Rhinoceros," and from Amédée, a writer who claims to be logical, fall into the category of those statements which the reader should expect to be logical because they come from persons who are by custom identified with the capacity to be logical. From the professor who is preparing his pupil to take her doctoral examinations in three weeks one expects logical statements, yet one finds the professor maintaining that disintegration is philosophy, science, and progress:

Professor: That's not it. That's not it at all. You always have a tendency to add. But one must be able to subtract too. It's not enough to integrate, you must also disintegrate. That's the way life is. That's philosophy. That's science. That's progress, civilization.¹

Following the student's lesson in mathematics, she is given a lesson in philology. Pronunciation, the professor believes, is "worth a whole language," and so he recalls from the speech of a friend he had known during his military experience examples of mispronunciations of the letter "f". The relationship between principle and example is entirely lacking:

Professor: . . . Instead of f, he said f. Thus, instead of "Birds of a feather flock together," he said: "Birds of a feather flock together." He pronounced filly instead of filly, Firmin instead of Firmin, French bean instead of French bean, go frig yourself instead of go frig yourself, farrago instead of farrago, fee fi fo fum instead of fee fi fo fum. . . March-April instead of March-April, Gerard de Nerval and not as correct--Gerard de Nerval. . . . However, he managed to conceal his fault so effectively, that, thanks to the hats he wore, no one ever noticed it.²

Amédée's pseudo-logic derives from his assertion implying that years will not elapse unless they are permitted to do so:

Amédée: I'll never succeed, Madeleine, in teaching you logic. If we'd gone to the authorities

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Lesson," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 55.

²Ibid., pp. 64-65.

the day he died, we'd have been in prison long ago or probably been executed. The fifteen years would never have had time to elapse. . . .¹

Ironically, the character in "Rhinoceros" who is called the Logician is the most patently illogical of all of the characters in Ionesco's plays. The Logician and his pupil, the Old Gentleman, figure prominently in the first act, but they do not appear in the rest of "Rhinoceros." The Logician is teaching the Old Gentleman the characteristics of syllogistic reasoning:

Logician: (to the Old Gentleman) Here is an example of a syllogism. The cat has four paws. Isidore and Fricot both have four paws. Therefore Isidore and Fricot are cats.

Old Gentleman: (to the Logician) My dog has got four paws.

Logician: Then it's a cat.

.

Old Gentleman: (to the Logician, after deep reflection) So then logically speaking, my dog must be a cat?

Logician: (to the Old Gentleman) Logically, yes. But the contrary is also true.

.

Logician: (to the Old Gentleman) Another Syllogism. All cats die. Socrates is dead. Therefore Socrates is a cat.

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Amédée or How to Get Rid of It," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 36.

Old Gentleman: And he's got four paws. That's true.
I've got a cat named Socrates.

.....

Old Gentleman: (to the Logician) So Socrates was a cat,
was he?

Logician: Logic has just revealed the fact to us.¹

That Ionesco was satirizing his academic critics in
"Improvisation" is shown clearly through the contrarities of
their logic:

Bart II: (to Ionesco) You can only get out of a vicious
circle by enclosing yourself in it. So don't
go and open the door or the vicious circle will
close in more. . . on you.

.....

Bart I: Instead of the expression 'get out of',
say 'get away from', which means 'alienate
yourself', and then you'll understand. For
example, you can only alienate yourself from
a vicious circle by not escaping from it:
whereas you can only escape from it by stay-
ing inside. What is inside is experienced
from the outside, and what is outside is
experienced from the inside. For the more
alienated you are. . .

Bart II: . . . the more involved you are. . .

Bart I: . . . and the more involved you are. . .

Bart II: . . . the more alienated you are. It's the
electrical shock of alienation, or the Y
effect.²

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Rhinoceros," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), pp. 18-20.

²Eugène Ionesco, "Improvisation," The Killer and Other Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 117.

Faulty logic from persons who do not make a special brief for being logical--persons who are not members of the intellectual community--can be illustrated through examples from several of Ionesco's plays. The first instance of faulty logic from "The Bald Soprano" which is given, derives first from the premise that if a captain goes down with his sinking ship, so should a doctor--if he is a good one--die with his dying patient, and second from shifting the metaphor so that first the patient is compared to a ship and then the doctor. The conclusion is a complete non-sequitur.

Mr. Smith: A conscientious doctor must die with his patient if they can't get well together. The captain of a ship goes down with his ship into the briny deep, he does not survive alone.

Mrs. Smith: One cannot compare a patient with a ship.

Mr. Smith: Why not? A ship has its diseases too; moreover, your doctor is as hale as a ship; that's why he should have perished at the same time as his patient, like the captain and his ship.

Mrs. Smith: Ah! I hadn't thought of that. . . Perhaps it is true. . . And then, what conclusions do you draw from this?

Mr. Smith: All doctors are quacks. And all patients too. Only the Royal Navy is honest in England.¹

Grandmother Jack's failure in logic occurs when she illustrates her vast experience by relating that she had a

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Bald Soprano," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 11.

great-uncle who had three addresses: ". . . he gave out the address and telephone number of two of them but never that of the third where he sometimes hid out, for he was in the secret service."¹ Mother Jack avows that she is "completely half-desperate,"² and Father Jack says, "I'm leaving this room to its own destiny. There's nothing else to do anyway. I'm going to my bedroom next door. I'll pack my bags and you'll never see me again except at mealtimes and sometimes during the day and in the night to get a bit to eat."³ In "Eggs", the sequel to "Jack," the characters have not learned to think more clearly, for regarding the failure of Roberta and Jack to produce offspring, Father Robert says, "Just because she's our only daughter doesn't mean she's sterile."⁴

The motif of false-logic is continued in "The Chairs" through the Old Woman's incongruous yoking together of things and persons:

Old Woman: . . . And have you invited everyone, all the characters, all the property owners, and all the intellectuals?

Old Man: Yes, and all the owners and all the intellectuals. (Silence)

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Jack or the Submission," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 82.

²Ibid., p. 83.

³Ibid., p. 84.

⁴Eugène Ionesco, "The Future Is in Eggs," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 125.

Old Woman: The janitors? the bishops? the chemists?
the tinsmiths? the violinists? the dele-
gates? the presidents? the police? the
merchants? the buildings? the pen holders?
the chromosomes?¹

In another part of Ionesco's world--the park bench of
"Maid to Marry"--the Gentleman tells the Lady: "You see,
Madame, mankind's future's in the future. It's just the
opposite for animals and plants. . . ."2

The fact that faulty reasoning is a characteristic of
numerous characters--both the intellectual and the non-
intellectual--suggests the ubiquity of the trait in the world
of Ionesco.

V. SELF-CONTRADICTION

In considering the motif of false logic, another
characteristic of the process of communication as it is
observed in Ionesco's plays immediately comes to mind: the
habit of self-contradiction. The relationship of self-
contradiction to false logic will readily be seen; and, were
it not for the fact that self-contradiction is so prominent
a feature in the dialogue of these plays, it would not deserve
separation from other kinds of false logic already discussed.
In some instances the self-contradiction is obvious within

¹Eugene Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans.
Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 121.

²Eugene Ionesco, "Maid to Marry," The Killer and Other
Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc.,
1960), p. 155.

the immediate context of the particular speech, that is a contradiction of what a character has previously said; in other cases the contradiction is apparent only some pages of dialogue later. The following examples of self-contradiction have been presented without comment in the belief that the dialogue will make the contradiction self-evident.

"The Bald Soprano":

Mr. Smith: The heart is ageless. (Silence)

Mr. Martin: That's true. (Silence)

Mrs. Smith: So they say. (Silence)

Mrs. Martin: They also say the opposite. (Silence)

Mr. Smith: The truth lies somewhere in between.
(Silence)

Mr. Martin: That's true. (Silence) ¹

"The Lesson":

Professor: That which distinguishes the neo-Spanish languages from each other and their idioms from the other linguistic groups, such as the group of languages called Austrian and neo-Austrian or Hapsburgian, as well as the Esperanto, Helvetian, Monacan, Swiss, Andorran, Basque, and jai alai groups, and also the groups of diplomatic and technical languages--that which distinguishes them, I repeat, is their striking resemblance which makes it so hard to distinguish them from each other--I'm speaking of the neo-Spanish languages which one is able to distinguish from each other, however, only thanks to their distinctive characteristics,

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Bald Soprano," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), pp. 20-21.

absolutely indisputable proofs of their extraordinary resemblance, which renders indisputable their common origin, and which, at the same time, differentiates them profoundly--through the continuation of the distinctive traits which I've just cited.¹

"Jack or the Submission":

Father Jack: I'm going to pack my bag! I'm going to pack my bag! (To his son:) Your finer feelings are not getting the upper hand! Insensate! Listen carefully to me: truth has only two sides, but it's the third side that's best! You can take my word for it! On the other hand, I expected this.²

"Amédée, or How to Get Rid of It":

Madeleine: (incoherently) I'm frightened. . . We shouldn't have made up our minds so quickly. . . We couldn't do anything else . . . We should have waited. . . It's all your fault. . . No, it's not your fault, I was right all the time, we simply had to...³

"The Chairs":

Old Woman: . . . You could have been head president, head king, or even head doctor, or head general, if you had wanted to, if only you'd had a little ambition in life. . .

Old Man: What good would that have done us? We'd not have lived any better. . . and besides, we have a position here. I am a general,

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Lesson," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 61.

²Eugène Ionesco, "Jack or the Submission," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 95.

³Eugène Ionesco, "Amédée or How to Get Rid of It," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 63.

in any case, of the house, since I am
the general factotum.¹

.....

Old Man: Listen to me, I've had a rich experience
of life. In all walks of life, at every
level of thought. . . .²

"Victims of Duty":

Detective: (shouting to Choubert, half of him becoming
the Detective again, though the other half
is still an astonished theatre-goer) Can
you see his dark shadow outlined against
the light? Or is it a shining silhouette
outlined against the dark?

Choubert: The fire has lost its brightness, the palace
its brilliance, it's getting darker.

Detective: (to Choubert) At least you can say what you
feel!. . . What are your feelings? Tell us!

Madeleine: (to Detective) My dear, we'd far better
spend the rest of the evening at a cab-
aret. . .

Choubert: (as before). . . Joy. . . and pain. . .
tearing you. . . healing you. . . Fullness.
...And emptiness. . . Hopeless hope. I
feel strong, I feel weak, I feel ill, I
feel well, but I feel, above all, I feel
myself, still, I feel myself. . .

Madeleine: (to Detective) All he does is contradict
himself.³

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans.
Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 114.

²Ibid., p. 146.

³Eugène Ionesco, "Victims of Duty," Three Plays,
trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958),
p. 143.

"Rhinoceros":

Botard: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you.
The fact that I despise religion doesn't
mean I don't esteem it highly.¹

VI. GARBLED PLATITUDES

Frequently related to false reasoning, although not always, is the recurrence of platitudes. Those clearly related to false reasoning are those which occur in a context in which they appear to have no relevance and those which are garbled--sometimes to the extent that little except the rhythmic pattern of the original is discernible. The recurrence of the platitude is so frequent as to be almost without number; as Richard Coe has pointed out, it is Ionesco's favorite weapon for demonstrating the absurdity of language.² His further remark about platitudes gives some idea of the variety of forms in which they appear:

Ionesco's platitudes contradict each other; they invert themselves, garble themselves; they spoonerise, they slip mysteriously out of gear; they harbour grotesque distortions and baroque neologisms. . .; they echo proverbs, maintaining sound and discarding sense. .³

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Rhinoceros," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 41.

²Richard N. Coe, Eugène Ionesco (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), p. 45.

³Ibid., p. 49.

To point out all of the varieties of platitudes is not fundamental to this study; a number of typical platitudes have been listed in order that evidence that they do exist may be seen and in order to illustrate the special flavor they add to Ionesco's linguistic stew:

Mrs. Martin: I prefer a bird in a bush to a sparrow in a barrow.¹

Professor: Our contemporary life has become most complex.

Pupil: And so very complicated too. . . .²

Mother Jack: Oh, they are truly made for each other, and all the rest that people say on such occasions!³

The Old Man: . . . as for me and my faithful helpmeet, after our long years of labor in behalf of the progress of humanity during which we fought the good fight, nothing remains for us but to withdraw. . . immediately, in order to make the supreme sacrifice.
⁴

Madeleine: . . . Never mind! Nothing venture, nothing win. There's no alternative! . . . I've no choice.⁵

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Bald Soprano," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 38.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The Lesson," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 49.

³Eugène Ionesco, "Jack or the Submission," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 94.

⁴Eugène Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 157.

⁵Eugène Ionesco, "Amédée or How to Get Rid of It," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 61.

Madeleine: Well, my dear, you know, the law is necessary, and what's necessary and indispensable is good, and everything that's good is nice. And it really is very nice indeed to be a good, law-abiding citizen and do one's duty and have a clear conscience! . . .¹

Man's Voice: Still, got to earn your living by the sweat of your brow, as the prophet says.²

Gentleman: We've come a long way since the days of our ancestors, who used to live in caves and gobble each other up and feed on sheepskins! . . . What a long way we've come!³

Botard: . . . It's always the little people who get the blame. . . .⁴

Announcer: The leader is being pressed forward, and pressed back, and now they're pressing his trousers! . . . He suffers the little children to come unto him. He has confidence in everybody. He inaugurates the police force. He pays tribute to justice. He salutes the great victors and the great vanquished. Finally he recites a poem. The people are very moved.⁵

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Victims of Duty," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 118.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The Killer," The Killer and Other Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 45.

³Eugène Ionesco, "Maid to Marry," The Killer and Other Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 154.

⁴Eugène Ionesco, "Rhinoceros," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 50.

⁵Eugène Ionesco, "The Leader," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 113.

VII. THE ECHO

If pseudo-logic, self-contradiction, and out-of-context or garbled platitudes may be thought of as indications that the thinking processes of characters in many Ionesco plays are not functioning in ways that readers suppose to be normal, another motif, the echo, appears to suggest that characters sometimes do not think at all, that they are totally unoriginal, or that they do not listen to what has been said to them. The latter seems to be the case in "The Bald Soprano"; Mrs. Smith hopes that Mary has done exactly what Mary has just reported that she has done:

Mary: (entering) I'm the maid. I have spent a very pleasant afternoon. I've been to the cinema with a man and I've seen a film with some women. After the cinema, we went to drink some brandy and milk and then read the newspaper.

Mrs. Smith: I hope that you've spent a pleasant afternoon, that you went to the cinema with a man and that you drank some brandy and milk.¹

The pupil's reply that life is complicated after the professor has said that it is complex is an echo too, although an echo of sense rather than of the words themselves.² In "Jack" the echo comes in the parrot-like response of the two families who are promoting the marriage of Jack and the three-nosed Roberta II. The attempt of the promoters to build the

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Bald Soprano," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 14.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The Lesson," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 49.

appearance of Roberta II to a climax is very like the effect of the announcement of an act by a circus ring-master:

Father Robert: (approaching Jack, holding his daughter by the hand): Now, my friend, you're in luck. To the bottle! Your desire has been specifically granted. Here she is, here she is, your three-nosed fiancée!

Mother Robert: Here she is, your three-nosed fiancée.

Jacqueline: So here she is, here she is then. . .

Mother Jack: My darling, you see her, she is yours, your little three-nosed bride, just as you wanted her!

Father Jack: What's that? You don't speak? You don't see her then? Here she is, here's the three-nosed girl for your special tastes.

The effect of echo in "The Future Is in Eggs" is operative. The cheerful offering of "cordolences" upon the death of Grandfather-Jacques is built to a climax through variations upon the cordolences theme by different vocal combinations. The peak is reached through sheer volume when everyone on stage cries out his cordolences:

Father Jacques: We must all console each other! (All the Jacques weep. The father, with dignity, wipes away his tears. From the Roberts' side is heard:)

Mother-Robert: Go and offer your cordolences.

Father-Robert: We must all go; we're part of the family now.

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Jack or the Submission," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 96.

Roberta: Yes, papa, yes, mama. (Roberta, having moved across to the Jacques, cries:)

Roberta: Heartiest cordolences!

All the
Jacques: (in chorus, with the exception of Grandfather-Jacques) Delighted.

Mother-Robert and
Father-Robert: Heartiest cordolences!

Roberta: Thank you very much. I'm so glad.

(The three Roberts now turn to Father-Jacques.)

The Three
Roberts: (to Father-Jacques) Heartiest cordolences!

Father-Jacques: Thank you, my dear friends, I accept them with joy.

The Three Roberts and
Father-Jacques: (turning to Mother-Jacques and saying, in chorus) We offer our heartiest cordolences, cordolences, cordolences, cordolences!¹

Two pages more of cordolences are offered.

The device of the echo in "The Chairs," where its use is more extensive than in any of the other plays, becomes more and more realistic as the play progresses, the later speeches of the Old Woman picking up only fragments, sometimes only parts of words, of what the Old Man has said:

Old Woman: We have suffered so much. (Aside:) The Orator ought to be here. It's certainly time.

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Future Is in Eggs," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1960), pp. 128-129.

Old Man: Suffered much, learned much.

Old Woman: (like an echo) Suffered much, learned much.

Old Man: You'll see for yourselves, my system is perfect.

Old Woman: (like an echo) You'll see for yourselves, his system is perfect.¹

.....

Old Man: (sniveling) May Your Majesty deign to forgive me! You are here at last. . . We had given up hope. . . you might not even have come. . . Oh! Savior, in my life, I have been humiliated. . .

Old Woman: (echo, sobbing) . . . miliated. . . miliated. . .

Old Man: . . . Your Majesty. . . I Have no other support. . . if you hadn't come, everything would have been too late. . . you are, Sire, my last recourse. . .

Old Woman: (echo) Last recourser . . . Sire. . . ast recourse. . . ire. . . recourse. . .²

The use of the echo device seems to have appealed to Ionesco, for in two plays--"Amedee" and "The Killer"--both written after "The Chairs," the echo has become literal:

Madeleine: . . . It was the postman who did it! It was the p-o-stman! (To Amedee:) Will they believe us? The postman must have gone, by now.

Amedée: All the better. (Loudly shouting to the rear of the stage:) It was the p-o-stman!

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 146.

²Ibid., p. 150.

Madeleine:

Amédée: It was the p-o-stman! The p-o-stman!

(They stop shouting, and the echo is heard.)

Echo: The p-o-stman! The p-o-stman!
P-o-stman! O-o-stman!¹

VIII. THE LINGUISTIC MUDDLE

The whole of the discussion relating to motifs in the verbal expression of Ionesco's characters--false logic, self-contradiction, platitudes, echoes--has been concerned with units of thought, without special attention to the peculiarities of language in which the thought--or the lack of it--is expressed. But the very words in which many of Ionesco's characters express themselves often harbor peculiarities which make an important contribution to the atmosphere and flavor of Ionesco's writing. Taken together, these peculiarities of language may be thought of as the "linguistic muddle"; they seem to suggest that the language itself is a reflection of the muddle within the minds of the characters that has been shown through those motifs of verbal expression that have already been discussed.

Most readers of Ionesco's plays will have discovered that the peculiarities of language are so complex and so

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Amédée or How to Get Rid of It," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 27.

striking that they are worthy of an exclusive study.¹ Such a study is beyond the scope of this thesis; its fundamental purpose would not be aided by the careful categorizing and scientific analysis of what takes place in the language. Ionesco was most concerned with language as such in his earlier plays: "The Bald Soprano," "The Lesson," "Jack," "The Chairs," and "The Future Is in Eggs," and it is in these plays that the progressive destruction of meaning--proceeding from empty banalities and platitudes, to self-contradiction, to echoes, and finally to sound that is almost totally devoid of meaning--can best be shown.

In "The Bald Soprano" the conversation of the Smiths and then of the maid, the Martins, and the Fire Chief, is all concerned with banalities and commonplaces about human existence. Oddities of time, the numerous Bobby Watsons, contradictions, platitudes, and echoes, enter the conversation to give it a most bizarre quality. This bizarreness increases as the play develops: Mrs. Smith's banalities about food and children have been magnified to proverbs and platitudes, those banalities which have achieved a certain status by frequent

¹Richard Coe cites one such study: Jean Vannier, "Languages de l'avant-garde," in Theatre Populaire, No. 18 (May 1, 1956), pp. 30-39. Coe, op. cit., p. 50; David Grossvogel also makes reference to such a study by Donald Watson, one of Ionesco's translators, but he does not give the source. Grossvogel, op. cit., p. 55.

repetition. Talk is further emptied of meaning as the platitudes are heaped together in an unrelated mass. Finally relevance of word to thought is cast aside altogether, and it is sound itself that is made to seem important; the sound is the meaning if there is any meaning at all. Thus the play ends with the Smiths and the Martins shouting in one another's ears:

Mrs. Martin: Bazaar, Balzac, bazooka!

Mr. Martin: Bizarre, beaux-arts, brassiers!

Mr. Smith: A, e, i, o, u, a, e, i, o, u, a, e, i, o, u, i!

Mrs. Martin: B, c, d, f, g, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, x, z!

Mr. Martin: From sage to stooge, from stage to serge!

Mrs. Smith: (imitating a train): Choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo!

Mr. Smith: It's!

Mrs. Martin: Not!

Mr. Martin: That!

Mrs. Smith: Way!

Mr. Smith: It's!

Mrs. Martin: O!

Mr. Martin: Ver!

Mrs. Smith: Here!

(All together, completely infuriated, screaming in each others' ears. The light is extinguished. In the darkness we hear, in an increasingly rapid rhythm:)

All Together: It's not that way, it's over here, it's not that way, it's over here, it's not that way, it's over here, it's not that way, it's over here!¹

That "The Lesson" is primarily a play about language is announced midpoint in the action when the maid warns the professor that "philology leads to calamity."² As the

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Bald Soprano," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), pp. 41-42.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The Lesson," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 76.

professor's attitude toward the pupil grows more and more threatening, his use of language in the language lesson becomes more and more meaningless, until the conceptual content of the single word "knife" is lost in a rhythmic repeating of the word that most critics have seen as the symbolizing of the rape of the pupil.¹

In "Jack" the complete subversion of meaning in language also comes at the play's end, running parallel to the de-humanization of the central figures, Roberta II and Jack, which one witnesses throughout the play. At the end Roberta II and Jack decide that one word will suffice for all things they wish to say:

Roberta II: All we need to designate things is one
single word: cat. Cats are called cat,
food: cat, insects: cat, chairs: cat,
you: cat, me: cat²

and, indeed, they themselves crouch on the stage animalistically as the curtain falls. It is in this position, clasped in one another's arms and purring that one finds Jack and Roberta at the beginning of "The Future Is in Eggs." There they regain a kind of sub-humanity for a time, but language again degenerates to a collection of animal sounds by the

¹For example, Bernard F. Dukore, "The Theatre of Ionesco: A Union of Form and Substance," Educational Theatre Journal, XIII (October, 1961), 181.

²Eugène Ionesco, "Jack or the Submission," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 109.

end of the play. Ionesco's next-to-last stage direction reads:

The cries of "Production!" and "Co-co-codac" start up again, the action speeds up even more in the general enthusiasm. Grandfather-Jacques in his frame also cries out: "Produce! Produce!!" The others say "Let's produce! Let's produce!"; they all give out "Co-co-codacs," and applaud.¹

The cycle of the language break-down is completed when, in "The Chairs," the orator for whom the Old Man has awaited all evening to tell the world the Old Man's message proves unable to speak at all, a mute.

IX. PROLIFERATION

Every critic who has made a general survey of Ionesco's writing has made mention of the motif of proliferation, not because it is the most prevalent of motifs, but because its manifestations are so apparent and often strange. The motif is one which can be seen both as a part of the world which man encounters in "Amédée" where the persons of the drama have no control, in the literal sense, over the growth of the corpse or the growth of the poisonous mushrooms which pop out upon the floors and walls of the apartment and as the proliferation of persons and things upon the stage which is the result of the actions of the characters. There are occasional speeches in which proliferation is abstracted,

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Future Is in Eggs," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 141.

such as the references to the Bobby Watsons in "The Bald Soprano" and the references to numerous languages by the professor in "The Lesson," but the proliferation motif as it will be shown here is concerned with the literal proliferation of objects and persons in the drama.

The motif first appears in "Jack" in the proliferation of names which are alike: Jack, Jacqueline, Father Jack, Grandfather Jack, Grandmother Jack, Roberta I and Roberta II (played by the same actress), Father Robert and Mother Robert. The fact that all of the characters except Jack are to wear masks, of course, re-enforces the idea that the names are alike because the persons who bear them are alike. The sexual imagery with which the play ends foreshadows the extension of the proliferation motif in the sequel, "The Future Is in Eggs":

Jack: My throat is parched, this has made me
thirsty. . . . Water, water, Ah! how he
flamed, the stallion. . . how beautiful it
was. . . what a flame. . . ah! (Exhausted.)
I'm thirsty. . .

Roberta: Come on. . . don't be afraid. . . I'm moist. . .
My necklace is made of mud, my breasts are
dissolving, my pelvis is wet, . . .¹

In "The Future Is in Eggs" the two central characters, Jack and Roberta, are in disgrace with their families because they have failed to produce offspring. Father-Jacques tells Jack

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Jack or the Submission," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 107.

that it is his duty to propagate the race, that he must replace those that pass away.¹ The crowing of Roberta signifies that success has at last been achieved, whereupon Jacques is placed upon the hatching table to hatch out the heaps of eggs that are carried to the table in relays by other members of the family. "Production! Production! Production!" cries Father-Jacques. "Eggs! Eggs! Eggs! Eggs!" cries Grandmother-Jacques. "Hatch, hatch, my son, hatch!" cries Mother-Jacques.² These eggs will make all manner of humanity, duly catalogued by the characters--and the play closes with Jacques covered in a great mound of eggs.

The proliferation motif is immediately apparent in "The Chairs," when the audience sees thirty-five chairs upon the stage and ten doors in the semi-circular walls. The stage rapidly fills with invisible characters until the chairs are all occupied and there is scarcely standing room remaining for the overflow of guests who have come to hear the Old Man's message to the world. Quite beside themselves, the Old Woman and the Old Man rush helter-skelter about the stage, bringing more chairs, escorting guests to seats, getting their feet stepped on and crying, "More people! More chairs! More

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Future Is in Eggs," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 131.

²Ibid., p. 137.

people! More chairs!"¹

The evidence of the motif in "Amédée" has already been cited, and the previous discussion of "The New Tenant" has called attention to the proliferation of furniture, so much furniture that it not only fills the tenant's apartment but flows into the street, blocking traffic, and into the underground, stopping trains, and into the Thames, stopping the very flow of the water.²

The motif of proliferation is seen in "Victims of Duty" in Madeleine's serving of coffee. Her entrances and exits steadily increase in speed as she repeatedly exits to the kitchen and returns, each time carrying more cups of coffee, until the sideboard and the table are overflowing with cups of coffee to which no one pays the slightest attention.³

The motif is seen in "The Killer" in the crowds that gather to hear the political harangues of Mother Peep, and in "Rhinoceros" when persons turn into rhinoceroses, until, by the play's end the streets are glutted with herds of the beasts.

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 140.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The New Tenant," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 114.

³In the production of the play by Hull House Theatre in Chicago in the winter of 1966, Madeleine even passed the cups to members of the audience.

Jacques Guicharnaud has called the world of Ionesco a "world out of control,"¹ observing that machines and dialogues move with regularity at first, "Then the growth or accumulation gathers speed until it reaches a mad precipitation."² The description is a particularly apt one with regard to the motif of proliferation.

X. DEHUMANIZATION

The great concern of Ionesco's characters for matter that the proliferation motif suggests is one kind of response to the conditions of the world. Another response is suggested by the frequency with which one may observe behavior in the characters which indicates that their reaction to the world has become something less than human. This response, which may be called the motif of de-humanization, is one which very generally pervades the plays and which frequently encompasses many of the other motifs which have been discussed to this point. De-humanization is manifested in two ways: in animalistic behavior and in mechanical behavior, both sometimes being implicit in the same set of circumstances.

Much of what has been said about the thinking process and the use of language in the plays demonstrates a kind of

¹Jacques Guicharnaud in collaboration with June Beckelman, Modern French Theatre from Giraudoux to Beckett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 178.

²Ibid., p. 184.

automatism on the part of the characters. The echo, for instance, comes with no thought on the part of the echoing character, as if he were little more than a sounding board, and the platitudes and proverbs--it is especially significant that no one in the plays is concerned about how inverted or garbled they may be--suggest too that those who utter them are sounding boards for a whole accumulation of values that they do not evaluate, but merely repeat. Such characters are, to show the animalism of the tendency, little more than parrots--J. S. Doubrovsky uses the felicitous term "psittacism" to denote the whole pattern of automated linguistic responses.¹ Not only the automatism of responses is animal-like, however; sometimes the sounds themselves seem imitative of birds or animals. One may be reminded, for instance, of the rapid repetition of meaningless syllables by the Smiths and the Martins which occurs just before the fall of the curtain in "The Bald Soprano," the purring of Jack and Roberta in "Jack" and "The Future Is in Eggs," or the abject behavior of the old couple in "The Chairs" in the presence of the invisible emperor: "Your servant, your slave, your dog, arf, arf, your dog, Your Majesty!" says the Old Man;

¹J. S. Doubrovsky, "Ionesco and the Comic of Absurdity," Yale French Studies, XXIII (Summer, 1959), p. 8.

and the Old Woman echoes, "Arf. . . arf. . . arf. . ."¹ One may recall too the repeated "Yes, Professor," of the pupil in "The Lesson," as well as her habit of dully repeating his last words as he instructs her.

Occasionally the emotional responses of characters are machine-like. In "The Future Is in Eggs" Jack feels nothing when told of his grandfather's death, but upon orders from his family he weeps. When told that he is overdoing it, Jack stops and smiles. The maid in "The Bald Soprano" is rather like a doll that has buttons on the back which may be pushed to obtain emotional responses: "Mary (bursts into laughter, then she bursts into tears. Then she smiles): 'I bought me a chamber pot.'"²

In "Amédée" the de-humanization motif is evident in an experience that Amédée recalls. He would have saved a drowning woman, he tells Madeleine, except that he couldn't swim, ". . . and anyway the fish were biting. . ."³

In "The New Tenant," it is the language of the characters again that stresses their mechanicalness. Repeatedly the furniture movers are heard counting, "One. . . two. . .

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 148.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The Bald Soprano," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 15.

³Eugène Ionesco, "Amédée or How to Get Rid of It," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 39.

three. . .four. . ." as they carry in the furniture, and they repeat after the Gentleman his comments about the placement of furniture.¹

In "Rhinoceros," Jean tells Berenger that he must overcome his careless habits of dress and his drinking and develop himself culturally, but when Berenger, appealing for Jean's help, asks Jean to come with him to the museum and to the theatre, Jean refuses: "I have to take a rest this afternoon; it's in my programme for the day."² Jean's life has achieved a machine-like regularity. The animalism of the characters in the play of course is implicit in the fact that most of them undergo a metamorphosis into rhinoceroses. As the transformation progresses, they become more and more indifferent to human values. When Jean has a headache and a small bump on his forehead--the usual sign that one is about to become a rhinoceros--Berenger advises him, in the name of friendship, that he should see a doctor:

Jean: I don't keep trying to get you to the doctor, do I? Leave people to do as they please.

Berenger: Don't get angry with me. You know very well I'm your friend.

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The New Tenant," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), pp. 108-109.

²Eugène Ionesco, "Rhinoceros," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 24.

Jean: There's no such thing as friendship. I don't believe in your friendship.

Berenger: That's a very hurtful thing to say.

Jean: There's nothing for you to get hurt about.

Berenger: My dear Jean. . .

Jean: I'm not your dear Jean.

Berenger: You're certainly in a very misanthropic mood today.

.

Jean: (not listening to Berenger) It's not that I hate people. I'm just indifferent to them-- or rather, they disgust me. . . .¹

In "The Killer" the reader receives the impression that there has been an attempt to compartmentalize and mechanize life in general. When Berenger marvels at the perfection of "The Radiant City" and congratulates the architect on his work, the Architect replies that it is ". . . the work I'm commissioned to do, part of my normal duties, what I specialize in."² As the conversation between the two continues, it becomes more and more clear that it is not the human values of "The Radiant City" that really interest him. He seems quite indifferent to them, for when Berenger comments upon the beauty of the city, the flowers, the peace, the Architect tells him that ". . . It's all calculated, all intentional.

¹Ibid., pp. 63-64.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The Killer," The Killer and Other Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 10.

Nothing was left to chance."¹ A detail such as the Architect's answering a telephone that rings in his pocket as he talks to Berenger further suggests that he is something of a mechanical man. Nor need Berenger tell the Architect his age for ". . . We have files on everyone."² The Architect tells Berenger that they do not speak the same language, that Berenger is one of ". . . those poetic personalities. As they exist, I suppose they must be necessary."³ The Architect then represents the utilitarian, mechanistic view of the world.

Later in "The Killer" the attempt to make men operate as machines is suggested by a voice from the street:

Our fifty-eight delivery boys waste too much time urinating. Five times a day, on average, they interrupt their deliveries to satisfy a personal need. The time is not deducted from their wages. They take advantage of this, so they've got to be disciplined; they can make water in turn once a month for four and a half hours without interruption. That will save all the coming and going, which sends up our costs. After all camels store up water.⁴

XI. THE WEIGHT SYNDROME

Several related states of feeling recur with so much frequency in Ionesco's plays that they cannot go unnoticed.

¹Ibid., p. 12

²Ibid., p. 14.

³Ibid., p. 19.

⁴Ibid., p. 51.

These are sickness, fatigue, and heaviness; and lightness or euphoria. In nearly all instances where they are observed these feelings on the part of characters are manifestations of an emotional or mental response to the world. The character who is much aware of his body weight or who feels tired or ill is nearly always emotionally or mentally depressed. Contrariwise, the character who experiences a feeling of bodily lightness is commonly in a happy or euphoric state of mind. The awareness of the body's weight at times of fatigue or illness and the sensation of bodily lightness in times of joy, especially euphoria, are not unfamiliar ones in the real world. In this sense, then, the factor common to both states of feeling is that of weight. For this reason--and because a more felicitous term could not be found, the term "weight syndrome" has been employed to describe the motif which these recurring states of feeling make up.

The girl-student in "The Lesson" defeated and depressed by her inability to comprehend the professor's instruction discovers that she has a toothache. As his lesson becomes more and more incomprehensible, the toothache becomes more severe until she repeatedly replies to his comments at queries that her teeth hurt or that she has a toothache.¹ Still the lesson progresses, and as the lesson progresses

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Lesson," *Four Plays*, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), pp. 63-73.

the pupil's pain spreads to her ears, her feet, her head, and finally to all parts of her body.

While the sensations of heaviness, fatigue, or illness in "Jack" are not specifically designated by either dialogue or stage directions, the mental state of Jack is depressed and obstinate until the closing seduction scene of the play when he becomes enamoured of Roberta II. No sense of elation is evoked in the seduction scene, however, and the crouching, mewing characters on the stage at the end of the play suggest that they have become mired rather than elevated. The mood of Jacques in "The Future Is in Eggs" returns to the ennui of "Jack" after his first fascination for Roberta has passed. Driven by his own and Roberta's family to produce, Jack finally succeeds and then faints. When consciousness returns, he can only say, "I want to get away."¹

"Old age is a heavy burden,"² says the Old Man of "The Chairs," but twenty-five pages of dialogue later, if he is to be believed, the reader discovers that his entire life has been something of a burden, for the Old Man complains that friends have betrayed and persecuted him despite his own goodness. Moreover the Old Man has had scabies and been "kicked in the ass"--he who could have saved sick humanity if

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Future Is in Eggs," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 135.

²Eugène Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 125.

only he had been given the opportunity.¹ These specific references to weight and illness, however, are minor compared to the strength given to the motif through the entire situation in which the Old Man and the Old Woman are found. At the end of life, they wait in vain to tell the world of a message which is untellable. Their leap out of the window does not carry them upward but down into the polluted sea, even as in life the Old Man's upward striving had been thwarted: " . . . I wanted to go in for sports. . . for mountain climbing. . . they pulled my feet and made me slip . . . I wanted to climb stairways, they rotted the steps. . . I fell down. . . ."2

Amédée excuses his failure to produce as a writer at the beginning of "Amédée" on the grounds that he is ". . . so tired. . . worn out, heavy. I've got indigestion and my tummy's blown out. I feel sleepy all the time."³ Madeleine too claims that she is "dog-tired."⁴ Later Amédée tells Madeleine that he gets sick every time he looks at the corpse, a clue perhaps that explains the heavy weariness that engulfs both Madeleine and Amédée, for neither of them has

¹Ibid., pp. 150-152.

²Ibid., p. 151.

³Eugène Ionesco, "Amédée or How to Get Rid of It," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 7.

⁴Ibid.

left the apartment for fifteen years, the period of time during which the corpse has shared the apartment with them. The juxtaposing of the remarks of Madeleine and Amédée tends to strengthen the notion that it is the presence of the corpse which so depresses them. Since they are about to be rid of the corpse, Amédée feels that now Madeleine can be happy, but she tells him that they cannot make up for all that lost time: ". . . All those wasted years, they're a dead weight. . . always with us. . ." ¹ When they at last remove the corpse, it is almost impossibly heavy, but when the deed is accomplished, Amédée's heaviness of movement and his depressed state of mind change to lightness and euphoria. The body that he has managed to wrap around him so that he can carry it more easily opens out like a parachute, and Amédée is lofted into the sky.

In his search for Mallot or Mallod--the detective who sends him on the search is uncertain whether the name is spelled with a "t" or a "d"--Choubert goes deep into his subconscious, and it is in this search through his subconscious that the feelings of heaviness and lightness are manifested in "Victims of Duty." The journey of Choubert into his subconscious is made literal on the stage; he descends "stairs" and from there must go still farther down. The reader

¹ Ibid., p. 41.

suspects that Coubert has virtually returned to the primal ooze when he says: "I'm walking through mud. It's sticking to the soles of my shoes. . . my feet are so heavy! I'm afraid of slipping."¹ In the search for Mallot (d), Choubert's "travels" take him to the cities of Europe, through deserts and jungles; then he begins the ascent of a steep mountain. The ascent is very difficult at first, but at the top he experiences exuberant freedom, lightness and euphoria. Madeleine fears the worst, that Choubert (like Amédée) will "take off." Indeed, Choubert does experience the ultimate sense of lightness; he seems to have become pure spirit:

Choubert: It's a morning in June. The air I breathe is lighter than air. I am lighter than air. The sun's melting into light that's mightier than the sun. I can float through solid objects. All forms have disappeared. I'm going up. . . and up. . . shimmering light. . . and up. . .²

The "dream" passes suddenly, and Choubert is discovered in a wastebasket when the lights again come up. He feels ill; the sense of heaviness has returned. To the detective the shifting from heaviness to lightness and back is a certain sign of Choubert's unreliability: ". . . he's heavy when he ought to be light, too light when he ought to be heavy, he's unbalanced, he's got no grip on reality."³

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Victims of Duty," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 129.

²Ibid., p. 150.

³Ibid., p. 154.

In "The Killer" Berenger attempts to describe to the architect the incredible sensation of lightness and airiness that he has felt perhaps eight or ten times in his life. His was a transcendental feeling of oneness with a kind of ethereal and eternal life force; he felt at such moments that he had always existed, that he was immortal. He knew such joy during those moments that he was certain that the slightest leap would have sent him flying through the air; for the burden of his body had evaporated:

. . . I walked and ran and cried: I am, I am everything is, everything is!. . . Oh, I'm sure I could have flown away, I'd lost so much weight, I was lighter than the blue sky I was breathing. . . The slightest effort, the tiniest little leap would have been enough. . . I should have taken off. . . I'm sure I should.¹

But the feeling was always momentary, followed by a sense of emptiness and an awareness of the things of the world about him, a return to awareness of matter, to mortality.

The opening of "Rhinoceros" finds Berenger in a town square on Sunday morning with his friend Jean. Berenger is unkempt, and suffers from an alcoholic hang-over and fatigue. When a rhinoceros is sighted running through the town, everyone evinces great surprise except Berenger. He is suffused with ennui. Berenger's reply to Jean's questions

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Killer," The Killer and Other Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 24.

about whether Berenger has seen the rhinoceros and what he thinks of it is indicative of his apathy. Berenger turns to the irrelevant observation that it made a lot of dust. Berenger's disinterest leads to a quarrel between him and Jean; when that is made up between them, a girl whom Berenger admires enters the sidewalk cafe and in his agitation Berenger spills his drink on Jean. Jean then insists that he must give up alcohol and Berenger admits that he doesn't really care for it but that he drinks because he feels out of place in life. He is tired, exhausted by life: "I'm so tired, I've been tired for years. It's exhausting to drag the weight of my own body about. . . I'm conscious of my body all the time, as if it were made of lead. . ." ¹ Jean attributes Berenger's heavy feeling to moral weakness. He himself, he says, ". . . feel [s] light, light as a feather! (He flaps his arms as if about to fly. . .)" ² a feeling he attributes to moral strength.

XII. DUTY

The final motif of the plays is made up of a recurring attitude on the part of many of Ionesco's characters that certain kinds of behavior and certain beliefs must be

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Rhinoceros," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), pp. 17-18.

²Ibid.

maintained for the sake of duty. The duty motif begins in "Jack or the Submission." At the play's beginning Jack is in difficulty with his family because of his failure to behave dutifully with regard to the family tradition of eating hashed brown potatoes. His father disowns him and his mother gnashes her teeth. However, after sister Jacqueline informs Jack that he is chronometrable, he succumbs: "Oh well, yes, yes, na, I adore hashed brown potatoes!"¹ Thus is Jack restored to the family bosom to be confronted with another duty. He must marry. At the outset he is very stubborn about fulfilling this duty too. Roberta I, the first bride offered, he says, is not ugly enough, for she has only two noses. The second bride offered, Roberta II, a three-nosed wench, is not even ugly enough to sour milk, according to Jack. But Roberta II does her duty as Jack's "presumed spouse" and seduces him. The duty motif continues to be developed in "The Future Is in Eggs." Jack and Roberta must produce offspring because it is their duty to the race.

Although there are some suggestions of a sense of duty on the part of Amédée in his feeling that he must write and in his feeling that he has a duty to rid the apartment of the corpse for Madeleine's sake, the motif does not really become explicit until the final act of the play when Amédée has taken the corpse out of the apartment and is dragging it

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Jack or the Submission," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 87.

through the streets with the intention of throwing it into the Seine. An American soldier helps Amédée by twirling him like a top; the corpse wraps about his body so that he need no longer drag it. All of this makes a great deal of noise so that the whole district is aroused, and police are sent to quell the disturbance. Amédée involuntarily eludes the police, for:

Suddenly a surprising thing happens. The body wound round Amedee's waist seems to have opened out like a sail or a huge parachute; the dead man's head has become a sort of glowing banner, and Amedee's head can be seen appearing above the rear wall, drawn up by the parachute; then his shoulders, his trunk and his legs follow. Amédée is flying up out of reach of the policeman.¹

Amédée apologizes to the gathering crowd. He is not deliberately trying to escape his duty, he tells them, although one woman observes as Amédée flies away that he "looks quite pleased all the same."² Says Amédée:

Madeleine, I promise you, you can really believe me. . . I didn't want to run away from my responsibilities. . . It's the wind, I didn't do anything! . . It's not on purpose! . . Not of my own free will.³

As the title implies, "Victims of Duty," is a play in which the duty motif is central. To Choubert, Madeleine says at the beginning of the play, ". . . And it really is very

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Amédée or How to Get Rid of It," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 73.

²Ibid., p. 74.

³Ibid., p. 76.

nice indeed to be a good, law-abiding citizen and do one's duty and have a clear conscience!"¹ When someone is heard at the door of the absent concierge, Madeleine tells Choubert that he should not inquire: ". . . Neither of us is a concierge, you know. Everyone in society has his own special duty to perform."²

In a Freudian shift of roles, a detective who has come in search of Mallot becomes an abstract figure of Choubert's father. Choubert believes that he killed his father to avenge the wrongs the father had done to Choubert's mother: ". . . I had to avenge my mother. . . I had to. . . What was my duty? . . ."³ As Choubert's descent into his subconscious continues, the detective becomes a drill sergeant who reminds Choubert that he has a duty to his country,⁴ and as Choubert goes on with the search for Mallot in his subconscious and threatens to soar through space from a mountain top, he is reminded by the detective that his great fault is that he's so light headed that he's likely to forget his duty.⁵ In fact, it is finally the bad memory of Choubert that prompts the detective, in the name of duty, to stuff Choubert's mouth with great hunks of bread in order to plug the gaps in his memory.

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Victims of Duty," Three Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 118.

²Ibid., p. 121.

³Ibid., p. 136.

⁴Ibid., p. 150.

⁵Ibid., pp. 150-152.

All the while that the detective is stuffing Choubert with bread he converses with Nicolas D'Eu, a poet friend of the Chouberts, who has unexpectedly arrived. The subject of their discussion is contemporary theatre. Nicolas is all for the avant-garde movement while the detective ". . . remain (s) Aristotelianly logical, true to myself, faithful to my duty and full of respect for my bosses. . . I don't believe in the absurd, everything hangs together, everything can be comprehended in time. . . ." ¹ Suddenly Nicolas becomes aware of the detective's force-feeding of Choubert and decides to put a stop to it. The detective blubbers that he is only doing his duty, that he is only a pawn tied to his orders, but the implacable Nicolas kills him, nevertheless. The detective "crumples into a bloody heap" with the words "I am. . . a victim. . . of duty!" ²

The play closes with Nicolas' admission that he has perhaps been a bit hasty, and he agrees with Madeleine that the detective shall not have died in vain--the search for Mallot shall continue:

Nicolas: (sits down in the Detective's place and holds out to Choubert a piece of bread)
Come on, eat, eat, to plug the gaps in your memory!

Choubert: I'm not hungry!

Madeleine: Haven't you any heart? Do as Nicolas says!

¹Ibid., p. 159.

²Ibid., p. 165.

Choubert: (takes the bread and bites into it) It
hu-u-urts!

Nicolas: (In the Detective's voice) No nonsense!
Swallow! Chew! Swallow! Chew!

Choubert: I'm a victim of duty, too!

Nicolas: So am I!

Madeleine: We're all victims of duty! (To Choubert:)
Swallow! Chew!¹

The duty motif is not central to "The Killer," but it does appear first in the attitude of the Architect who is the planner and developer of the utopian "Radiant City." His conception of duty is simply to do the job that he has been commissioned to do. To judge whether or not Berenger's occasional feeling that life is sick is wise is not one of his duties, he tells Berenger. That is something for the logic department to look into. In this play the concept of duty is involved closely with the mechanism and compartmentalization of life. Except for Berenger, the characters of the play all have only the duty to perform that their job requires of them. The traffic policemen cannot help him to find the killer whom he searches for because it is their job to control traffic. A noisy surrealistic scene in which are heard quarrels among drivers of vehicles, the voice of a teacher instructing children in a classroom, the concierge quarreling with someone who has come to inquire about a resident in her

¹Ibid., p. 166.

building, and the discussion of persons who would regulate the efficiency of fifty-eight delivery boys suggests that only Berenger is concerned with finding and stopping the killer--the others have their duties to perform. Berenger too, though he may only be deluding himself about his real reason for finding the killer, believes that it is his duty to stop the killer:

Once he's arrested, bound hand and foot, out of harm's way, the spring will come back forever, and every city will be radiant. . . I shall have my reward. That's not what I'm after. To have done my duty, that's enough.¹

The duty motif is introduced early in "Rhinoceros" when the Sunday-morning discussion between Jean and Berenger takes place regarding Berenger's carelessness about his dress, his drunkenness and his generally disorganized mode of life. Berenger attributes his Saturday night reveling to his being unable to get used to this life, to his boredom with the daily routine of eight hours per day at his office. Jean tells him that everyone must get used to such a life--unless of course one considers himself a superior being. The really superior being, says Jean, is the man who fulfills his duty as an employee.

On Monday morning at the office where Berenger works the news of the sighting of the rhinoceros on the day before

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Killer," The Killer and Other Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 96.

is discussed. The participants are divided between those who believe in the existence of the rhinoceros and the skeptics. The question is settled when the wife of an employee, Mrs. Boeuf, arrives to say that her husband is not reporting for work because he has "a touch of flu."¹ Mrs. Boeuf is out of breath because she has been chased all the way by a rhinoceros. After staring at the animal out of the window for a few moments, she determines that the rhinoceros is her husband and so jumps out of the window onto its back and directs it home. Says Botard, "It's no more than her duty."²

One by one the persons of the play become rhinoceroses, even Papillon the office manager. Jean's co-worker, Dudard, feels that rhinoceritis is not necessarily evil, that Berenger's objection to Papillon's metamorphosis is narrow-minded. Jean takes the view that Papillon should have remained human, that it was his duty not to succumb.

Soon Dudard himself, rational, scientific, and objective, turns into a rhinoceros. He joins his friends and co-workers who have become rhinoceroses because, "It's my duty to stick by them; I have to do my duty."³ With Dudard's metamorphosis, Berenger and his fiancée, Daisy,

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Rhinoceros," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 47.

²Ibid., p. 52.

³Ibid., p. 93.

are the only human beings left in the world. Berenger begins to have feelings of guilt--perhaps if he had been nicer to Jean he might not have become a rhinoceros, but Daisy believes that feelings of guilt show a lack of purity--that both she and Berenger are good and that they owe themselves ". . . a duty to be happy in spite of everything."¹

Daisy's headache and her advice to Berenger that they must try to adapt themselves and get along with the rhinoceroses foreshadow her own metamorphosis. Completely alone, Berenger tries to transform himself into a rhinoceros, but he cannot. And so he rationalizes: "I'll take on the lot of them! I'll put up a fight against the lot of them, the whole lot of them! I'm the last man left, and I'm staying that way until the end. I'm not capitulating!"² Thus does Jean deceive himself into believing that he alone remains faithful--dutiful--to the ideals of humanity.

¹Ibid., p. 98.

²Ibid., p. 107.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOURGEOIS MENTALITY REVEALED

In interpreting the significance of the many motifs that have been revealed in Chapter III, it is necessary first to return to the purpose stated at the outset of Chapter III. The purpose was to show how the motifs in characterization and behavior objectify Ionesco's conception of the "bourgeois mentality." His bourgeois man, he said, was the man of fixed ideas, the person--of whatever ideological belief--who accepts notions of what truth is and how it is arrived at that others have passed on to him. The bourgeois may be a victimizer, the person who imposes his beliefs on others; or he may be the victimized, the person who is dominated by the ideologies or conventions of others.

The duty motif demonstrates conformity to several fixed patterns of thought. Jack's submission is to family tradition, to the convention of marriage, and to the conception that it is a duty to propagate the race. Amedee too has a duty to marriage--devoid of love though it has become--to progress, to social realism and to the welfare of his fellow man. In "Victims of Duty" Choubert is told that he has a duty to law and to his country. The detective claims a duty to logical thought and to his bosses, and

Nicolas D'Eu claims a duty to the dead. In "The Killer" the architect speaks of the virtue of doing one's duty to his employer and Berenger refers to his duty to mankind. Like the architect, Jean (in "Rhinoceros") says that the best of men is the one who does his job well; Botard admires Mrs. Boeuf's leap to the back of the rhinoceros because it is her duty to her marriage; Dudard says that one has a duty to stand by one's friends; and Berenger remains faithful to the ideals of humanity.

A second kind of conformity is the belief that life's problems can be solved through rational thinking. That Ionesco takes a negative view toward this position is clear enough from the motif of false logic, particularly when false logic springs from the lips of those whom one may think of as the proprietors of logic. As Richard Coe has pointed out regarding the professor in "The Lesson,"

Two provinces especially would seem to belong by right to the domain of the rational man: language and mathematics. It is therefore significant that, in "La Leçon," these are precisely the two subjects by means of which the Professor brings about the final moral disintegration of his pupil.¹

But one does not look for logic only from mathematicians and philologists. One expects it from the propounders of particular political, philosophical and social ideologies as well.

¹Richard N. Coe, Eugène Ionesco (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), p. 29.

Yet Botard, in "Rhinoceros," identifiable with leftist utilitarian politics because of his utterance of several of the standard clichés, has been shown guilty of false logic. He further exemplifies the unreliability of reason in his refusal to believe in the existence of the rhinoceros. His "reason" is really founded upon a set of prejudices against religion, against employers, against journalism, against the establishment in general. Of Botard, and Jean and Dudard as well, Ionesco comments, "It will surely be apparent that the speeches of Botard, of Jean and Dudard are nothing but the pet shibboleths and slogans of various dogmas, concealing (sic) beneath a mask of cold objectivity and the most irrational and violent pressures."¹ The ridicule of rational political views can also be seen in "The Killer" in the irrational propaganda of Mother Peep. Her political slogans are a satire of totalitarian views of whatever political color.

The attack against proprietors of a rational system continues in "Improvisation." Here Ionesco is dealing with a matter of interest to himself both personally and professionally, for he holds up to ridicule the three doctors of teatrology, all indistinguishable from one another in their madly irrational rejection of ". . . everything which

¹"Preface to Rhinoceros," Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), p. 199.

does not conform to their ideas, and which does not represent their own social context."¹

Philosophical systems are attacked through a special branch of philosophy--logic. Here again the attack comes in the form of a satire when the deductions of the logician and his pupil in "Rhinoceros" are shown to lead not to truth but to a ridiculous parody of truth. The interspersing of the talk of the logician and his pupil serves as a kind of counterpoint to the dialogue between Berenger and Jean when they talk first about the need to organize rationally one's life and then about the question of whether the rhinoceros was an Asiatic or an African one. The reader becomes aware that the answers of the logician and his pupil serve almost as well as questions and replies to the conversation of Berenger and Jean. The counterpoint dialogue has the effect of bringing into question the logic of Jean and Berenger.

The ridiculousness of the logician begins the logic motif which runs through the rest of "Rhinoceros" as each of the characters explains the existence of the rhinoceros in terms of his own pet ideology. Richard Coe has pointed out that once the assumption has been made that "each and every existing phenomenon must partake of this necessary

¹Leonard Cabell Pronko, Avant-Garde: The Experimental Theater in France (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 65.

logicality, the harm is done."¹ In trying to explain the phenomenon, the characters lose sight of the basic startling fact that rhinoceroses have been seen, exemplified by Jean and Berenger's red-herring argument about whether the first one seen was Asiatic or African, and the fact that people are turning into rhinoceroses. Against all arguments which explain why people are turning into rhinoceroses, Berenger stands as the exponent of humanity and human traditions. His arguing for human values is no better founded in reason than are the arguments that maintain that it is all right or even positively good to become a rhinoceros. Thus Ionesco objectively sweeps all shades of fixed thought into the dustbin of fixed ideas. Berenger's notion that his view may be hopelessly middle class would be confirmed by Ionesco, who believes that all ideas are subject to re-evaluation if not to demolition.

The false logic of characters in the plays who cannot be identified with the thought proprietors and the motif of self-contradiction both seem to inform the reader of the general failure of reason. The height of the folly of dependence upon reason is reached in "The Killer." Berenger, like the Berenger of "Rhinoceros," is an humanitarian. When he at last meets the killer whom he has been seeking, Ionesco

¹Coe, op. cit., p. 97.

tells the reader in a stage direction that Berenger ". . . speaks with an eloquence that should underline the tragically worthless and outdated commonplaces."¹ Those outdated commonplaces are offered to stay the hand of death itself, for that is who the killer is. The spectrum of humanity covered by his victims, persons of all ages, sexes, and occupations, suggests this. Of course none of Berenger's arguments serve to dissuade the killer, and he himself becomes a victim.

The obsession of Ionesco characters with platitudes and proverbs is really little more than a way of showing the ultimate in the vacuous reasoning that is inherent in the motifs of false logic and self-contradiction. If characters who are dependent upon reason to explain all phenomena of the world are guilty of mental conformity, those who utter platitudes have gone a step beyond, for they seem to find security not so much in the process of thinking as in the repetition of a pattern of familiar sounds. The perceptive capacities of the individual have been voided in the turn to the platitude; the platitude speaks in no individual's interest, only in the interest of encrusted conventions which typify the bourgeois mind.

Quite as much as the platitude is a step below the level of false logic, if one may establish a rational-

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Killer," The Killer and Other Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 99.

linguistic hierarchy, the echo and the linguistic muddle are the following steps in descending order. Whereas the platitute is the repetition of sound pattern derived from social convention, the echo is a repetition either of the thought of the speaker himself or of another character in the play. (This is not the only significance of the echo, as succeeding paragraphs will show.) The linguistic muddle contains within itself a hierarchy of language degeneration, but as has been said before, a detailed exploration of the linguistic muddle is a subject appropriate to an exclusive study. The muddle reaches the ultimate in the destruction of communication when speech becomes only the laboriously produced guttural utterances of a mute.

Ionesco has at various times said that, apart from the comedy inherent in his toying with words, he wished to see language revitalized and that such revitalization might come only following the destruction of language, for language has lost much of its meaning. The loss of meaning in language comes from using words in place of thought, or perhaps it is as the Old Woman in "The Chairs" said, "It's in speaking that ideas come to us, . . ."¹ In its loss of meaning the linguistic muddle too has roots in the Ionesco conception of the bourgeois, for non-thinking conformity is a quality

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Chairs," Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), p. 120.

Ionesco consistently associates with the bourgeois mentality.

If one considers the abilities to think and to speak as the peculiar attributes of being human, then it follows that to the extent the bourgeois man is deficient in those powers he is lacking in humanity. Of Ionesco's first four plays: "The Bald Soprano," "The Lesson," "Jack," and "The Future Is in Eggs," Leonard Pronko has observed:

In these plays it [language] has become the symbol of that antispiritual, antihuman presence that inevitably wins out. Words no longer have any profound meaning, or stand for any real idea. Rather they have become objects, things, that by their very presence crowd out the meaning that might otherwise have existed.¹

The dehumanization of the bourgeois man is also shown in Ionesco's plays through the "dehumanization motif," which includes animalistic behavior and mechanicalness.

The bourgeois man's animalistic and mechanical behavior implies a loss of individualizing personality traits, shown in several of the plays by the multiple use of the same names and in similarity of appearance as exemplified by the use of masks in "Jack" and "The Future Is in Eggs," and the wearing of doctoral robes by the Bartholomeuses in "Improvisation." Some of the same impression is gained through the use of the very common names of Smith and Martin in "The Bald Soprano" and of course through the interchanging of the roles of the Smiths and the Martins at the end of the play. One

¹Pronko, loc. cit., p. 76.

notes too that in many of the plays characters are part of off-stage crowds or that they are faceless voices from "somewhere." The speaking of platitudes, the echoing of one another, and the general use of clichés also strengthens the idea that these characters might be easily interchanged with no one the wiser. Nor is it any wonder that persons become confused about their own and others' identity and the roles that are appropriate to them in a world of standardized bourgeois conventions and beliefs. The proliferation of men transmuted into rhinoceroses and the piling up of future specimens of humanity as heaps of eggs furthers the impression that the occupants of Ionesco's world have become dehumanized. The disappearance of human characteristics becomes literal on the stage of "The Chairs."

The dehumanization of characters in all of these ways, and in many other ways not reviewed, may be seen at once as both the evidence of bourgeois dehumanizing forces and a reaction to such forces. Such figures as the families of Jack and Roberta in "Jack" and "The Future Is in Eggs"; the professor in "The Lesson"; the caretaker in "The New Tenant"; Botard, Dudard, and Jean, in "Rhinoceros"; the architect and the concierge (Mother Peep as well) in "The Killer"; the detective in "Victims of Duty"; and society in general as represented by the police and the people in the street in "Amédée" can be seen as proprietors of bourgeois conventions

and fixed ideas. Often these proprietary figures are themselves the victims of the rigid thought and custom patterns of which they are the guardians. Thus the professor, although a proprietor of logic and language, is also a victim of his unlimited power over his pupil, for she is the fortieth such victim. Each time he rapes and kills he must suffer the agony of remorse. The detective in "Victims of Duty" is a victim of his too relentless advocacy of the belief that he must not be swayed from his duty to find Mallot, his duty to his bosses and to Aristotelian logic. For it is because of this that he is killed by Nicolas D'Eu, the propounder of an opposite (theatrical) principle.

More usually, however, the central characters of the plays, those more human figures (Jack, for example, does not wear a mask), are the victims; it is they who submit to the dominating figures that represent the status quo. Jack's submission to his family is perhaps the simplest example, and certainly the pupil of "The Lesson" is an obvious example of the victimized figure. Although it is uncertain just what Jack may believe in, he is in rebellion against the bourgeois tradition of his family--the eating of hashed brown potatoes--and he is in rebellion against the marriage which is being forced upon him. Martin Esslin sees Jack as a traditional figure of French culture: "The acceptance of the bourgeois creed by the rebellious ex-bohemian son is,

according to the French tradition, the signal for settling down and marriage."¹ Thus when Jack finally lies and says that he does, after all, adore hashed brown potatoes, he has been readied for the capitulation to the arranged bourgeois marriage with Roberta. What is important to notice is the fact that thenceforth Jack becomes an automaton who cries on command--in fulfillment of a tradition of mourning the dead--and eventually scarcely more than a machine. Although Berenger, of "Rhinoceros," has been seen by some critics² as a victor over the turn to the Nazi brand of totalitarianism which the transmutation motif of the play is intended to parallel,³ the notion that Berenger was a victor appears to overlook the final speech in which Berenger does try to become a rhinoceros but is unable to do so. How hollow his final words then sound: "I'm the last man left, and I'm

¹Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1961), p. 97.

²For instance, David Grossvogel, Four Playwrights and a Postscript (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 78.

³Ionesco said in a preface to the play that Berenger's reaction to rhinocerotitis was a parallel to that of Denis de Rougemont when he was in Germany at the scene of a Nazi rally. He also points out that while "Rhinoceros" is an anti-Nazi play, it is also ". . . mainly an attack on collective hysteria and the epidemics that lurk beneath the surface of reason and ideas but are none the less serious collective diseases passed off as ideologies. . . ." Eugene Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), pp. 198-199.

staying that way until the end. I'm not capitulating!"¹ If his remaining an individual is a victory, it is only a victory after the fact, hardly a spiritual one.

Like the dehumanization motifs the "weight syndrome" motif can also be seen as the reaction of characters to the circumstances of the bourgeois world. The perpetual weariness of Amédée and Madeleine very clearly stems from their being chained to the weight of a corpse of uncertain identity, a corpse which may be taken as a symbol of their marriage, now dead for fifteen years. It is the bourgeois attitude toward marriage which keeps them imprisoned in the apartment with that corpse. Yet when they do decide to rid themselves of the corpse before it smothers them completely and brings down their house about their ears, Amédée experiences the fantastic euphoria and sense of freedom that hoists him skyward, away from "social realism" and the weight of responsibility. The feeling of evanescence and transcendency that Berenger tries to convey to the architect in "The Killer," is coincident with the loss of awareness of the weight and noise of the "things" of this world. He feels at such times only the wonder of being and that he is immortal. Those moments of transcendency are beyond the understanding of the

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Rhinoceros," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 107.

automatized architect. Berenger is not understood by the people of his world, who accept the presence of the killer as a fact of existence and turn their attention to chimeric totalitarian promises of utopia that Mother Peep offers.

In virtually all of the plays--apart from those minor sketches: "Improvisation," "Maid to Marry," and "The Leader"--the feeling of heaviness and its concomitants, illness and physical debilitation, can be seen as a reaction to the world on the part of the "human" characters. The feeling of lightness that is experienced by Amédée, Choubert, and Berenger is an escape from the world, although, except in the case of Amédée, the escape is a fleeting one.

The "weight syndrome" is related to the motif of the proliferation of things, for the burden of materialism is not only something which is felt by the characters; it is also seen on the stage in tangible form in the heaps of eggs, the chairs, the giant corpse, the stacks of furniture, the herds of rhinoceroses, and the multiplying cups and saucers. Of the proliferation of the cups and saucers, Martin Esslin said, ". . . Madeleine's coffee cups. . . are one of the manifestations of the heavy, leaden, hopeless, depressive state of consciousness,"¹ and the relevance of the following statement by Ionesco to the significance of proliferation

¹Esslin, op. cit., p. 105.

will readily be apprehended:

The universe, encumbered with matter, is then empty of presence: "too much" links up with "not enough" and objects are the materialization of solitude, of victory of anti-spiritual forces, of everything we are struggling against.¹

The realization of self, then, for Ionesco, is smothered in the concern for the material and anti-spiritual. The smothering of the self in material is most vividly shown in "The New Tenant" in the entombment of the tenant in his furniture.

The end result of conformity to bourgeois fixed ideas and the dominance of things is alienation. Ionesco has taken note of the paradox of our age that man is most isolated at a time when he is least able to find solitude:

No one ever talked of incommunicability at a time when men were able to isolate themselves; incommunicability and isolation are paradoxically the tragic themes of the modern world, where everything is done collectively, where there is constant nationalization or socialization, where man can no longer be alone--even in individualistic countries the individual conscience is in fact invaded and destroyed by the pressure of the crushing and impersonal world of slogans: whether good or bad, for politics or publicity, it is all odious propaganda, the sickness of our time.²

Ionesco's view here is reflected on his stage, for one finds that most of his major plays are heavily populated, if not with central figures seen and heard on the stage, then with

¹Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), p. 164.

²Ibid., p. 151.

off-stage crowds as in "Amédée," "The Killer," and "Rhinceros." Yet in the midst of many man is alienated and alone; the inner being, the self that remains below the surface of the social man, has been neglected.

Virtually all of the motifs of the plays are symptomatic of the individual's alienation: the confusion of identity and role, the communication failure, the conformity to fixed ideas, the dehumanization. One thinks of the futile end to which conversation arrives in "The Bald Soprano" and the alienated beings from whom such a lack of communication must derive. One thinks of the gradual alienation of the student from the professor that results from the barrage of incomprehensible language with which she is faced. One thinks of Jack's cry beneath his heap of eggs: "I want a fountain of light, incandescent water, fire of ice, snows of fire,"¹ and knows that he will remain alienated by his obligations. One thinks of the old couple in "The Chairs" isolated in their island tower and the lack of any language to communicate a lifetime of experience, a message which does not exist. One thinks of Amédée's soaring above the conventional void below and his dubious protest that he does not wish to be alienated. One thinks of the new tenant and

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Future Is in Eggs," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 141.

his alienation midst a roomful of furniture that flows into the street and blocks the Thames. One thinks of the paths of duty which alienate Choubert and the detective. One thinks of Berenger's alienation from the crowds that make up the traffic in the street and the crowds that make up the traffic in the street and the crowds at the political rally, for only he is interested in apprehending the killer--and his long walk in grey light to face the killer alone. And finally, one thinks of the second Berenger, an alien being in a world of rhinoceroses.

CHAPTER V

ANGUISH AND ABSURDITY

The alienation of man in the bourgeois world is strikingly reminiscent of a statement by Albert Camus in his essay on absurdity, "The Myth of Sisyphus": ". . . in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger."¹ But a second thought concerning the resemblance of the theme of alienation in Ionesco's plays and Camus' remark will reveal that the resemblance is somewhat superficial, for the persons of Ionesco's drama, with one or two noteworthy exceptions, do not perceive the source of their alienation. For them the world is not divested of illusions and lights; there are few clues to show that the characters themselves understand the cause of their alienation, their anguish. Their anguish is the result of accepting the governing bourgeois paraphernalia--its dependence upon rationality and its encrusted conventions. Few of the anguished victims question the values of the bourgeois though they suffer anguish under its dominance and occasionally struggle against it. It is, of course,

¹Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p. 6.

in the acceptance of the status quo modes of living and problem-solving that these characters may be called the petite bourgeoisie, in Ionesco's sense of the term. The statement that few characters question the values of the bourgeois leaves room for later consideration of the exceptions who seem to sense the absurdity of life.

While the characters of Ionesco's plays do not generally see the source of their alienation, the fallacy of bourgeois values, Eugène Ionesco does have the vision; it is also that vision which links his plays to the world view of the Absurdists and the Theatre of the Absurd. Camus' essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus," defines absurdity. Camus stated that the absurd position, the notion of the absurd, begins with the feeling that one's life is absurd, the feeling that there is a ". . . divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting. . . ." ¹ This feeling may, according to Camus, strike one at any moment, on any street corner. Most usually the feeling of absurdity arrives with the weariness that comes at the end of some actions that a man may routinely follow in his daily life:

Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm-- this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. ²

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 13.

The amazement is the wonder about "what is it all for" that the mechanical man feels. From the amazement man may either return to his routine or he may come to "the definitive awakening."¹

The absurd feeling may also come at a moment when man is no longer able to assert his youth firmly. Always waiting for a tomorrow which will allow him to do certain things, at thirty he sees the end of the curve of his life and recognizes that he does not want to die, and the absurdity of wishing for tomorrow strikes him:

He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy. Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it. That revolt of the flesh is the absurd.²

Or one may feel absurdity when he recognizes nature for what it is, quite inhuman, and that the romantic cloak man has placed about it is illusory. Or one may experience the feeling when watching a man talking on a telephone behind a glass partition and wonder why he is alive.³ In short, man wonders at his existence and seeks to find reasons for it.

Man seeks reasons for his existence because he has an inherent nostalgia for unity and order. Though science and reason may go far in explaining many of the world's phenomena, the question of why the world exists and why man exists is

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., pp. 13-14.

³Ibid., p. 15.

left unanswered:

Hence the intelligence, too, tells me in its way that this world is absurd. Its contrary, blind reason may well claim that all is clear; I was waiting for proof and longing for it to be right. But despite so many pretentious centuries and over the heads of so many eloquent and persuasive men, I know that it is false. . . . That universal reason, practical or ethical, that determinism, those categories that explain everything are enough to make a decent man laugh. . . . In this unitelligible and limited universe, a man's fate henceforth assumes its meaning. A horde of irrationals has sprung up and surrounds him until his ultimate end. In his recovered and now studied lucidity, the feeling of the absurd becomes clear and definite. I said that the world is absurd, but I was too hasty. This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart.¹

As the latter part of the Camus' statement implies, it is not the world that is absurd, nor man; it is the confrontation of the world by man. It is the attempt of man to explain his relationship to the universe that is absurd.

Camus' essay goes on to explain the difference between the feeling of absurdity and the "notion" of absurdity, the latter being an intellectual appraisal of the feeling of absurdity which leads to a philosophical position. There is little value in attempting to describe that philosophical position, however, for Ionesco's plays deal with the feeling of absurdity rather than with the ultimate philosophical position.

¹Ibid., pp. 20-21.

Although he does not explicitly espouse the absurd as a philosophy, Ionesco frequently has referred to the absurdity of characters, the absurdity of language, or the absurdity of the world. In addition, in Ionesco's essays are to be found occasional statements that quite strikingly parallel the feeling of absurdity as it has been described by Camus. The following passage from "Experience of the Theatre" is very like the example of the feeling of absurdity that Camus has described in his telephone booth anecdote:

If you stop up your ears to shut out the dance music an orchestra is playing but go on watching the dancers, you can see how ridiculous they look, how fantastic their movements are; in the same way if someone were present for the first time at the celebration of some religious rite, the whole ceremony would seem to him incomprehensible and absurd.¹

Nor can one fail to recognize the parallel between Camus' attitude that we are strange and alien in the world and the attitude of Ionesco in the following passage from an interview:

Have we not the impression that the real is unreal, that it is not really for us? That this world is not our true world? If it were, why should we want to change things? We would not even know it was imperfect or be aware of evil. . . . It is in our nature to understand everything, and we understand very little: we cannot understand ourselves. . . . we do not want to die. . . but we do die.²

¹Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), p. 17.

²Ibid., p. 110.

In addition to these there is the statement of Ionesco quoted by Esslin, which has been utilized in Chapter I of this thesis: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. . . . Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."¹

That Ionesco is a dramatist rather than a philosopher, as he has so often implied in his general rejection of ideologies, should not be forgotten, however; and it is to his plays that one must look for the evidences of the connection of his drama to absurdity. Furthermore it is the plays which are the central object of study in this thesis. Ionesco's preference that one look to the events of his plays in order to find his meaning has been referred to earlier in this paper. His view is that the play itself is the meaning: this is one way of saying that Ionesco wished to objectify the absurdity of the world and of man's condition rather than resort to statement. In this wish to objectify, rather than to tell, Ionesco is close to the concretizing which is what Camus maintains to be the proper work of the absurd artist:

For an absurd work of art to be possible, thought in its most lucid form must be involved in it. But

¹Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1961), p. xix, citing Eugene Ionesco, "Dans les Armes de la Ville," Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud-Jean-Louis Barrault, Paris, X (October, 1957).

at the same time thought must not be apparent except as the regulating intelligence. . . . The work of art is born of the intelligence's refusal to reason the concrete. . . . The work of art embodies a drama of the intelligence, but it proves this only indirectly. The absurd work requires an artist conscious of these limitations and an art in which the concrete signifies nothing more than itself.¹

Ionesco's plays objectify his absurd world view through the collection of motifs which demonstrate his sympathy with Camus' assertion that the world is irrational and that man's anguish, his nostalgia to understand his relationship to the world, is in vain. The destruction of the normal continuum of time and the fantastic physical phenomena concretize "the unintelligible universe."² Even the presence of death may seem as an objectification of the absurd world, for death is as irrational as life.

The behavior of man in Ionesco's world, too, surely objectifies "that divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting," which, Camus says, "truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity."³ That feeling is powerfully conveyed through the confused identity and confused role motifs and through the general breakdown of language, which seems to say that man is so alienated that he has lost even the power to communicate with his fellows. If he sometimes

¹Camus, op. cit., p. 97.

²Ibid., p. 21

³Ibid., p. 6.

does not seem to feel the anguish which Camus has described as a beginning in the recognition that life is meaningless and absurd, it is often because Ionesco has taken him past the point of feeling anything at all. One feels this to be true of the characters of "The Bald Soprano," in particular, who have become almost totally mechanical.

But most of the central characters of the plays have been humanized enough so that they do feel, and what they often feel is that state of anxiety that precedes the feeling of absurdity. Their anxiety is evidenced in the weight syndrome, a motif that is comparable to the ". . . weariness which comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life. . ."1 which Camus sees as the prelude to the consciousness of absurdity.

In his unconvincing claim that he does want to keep his feet on the ground, one suspects that Amédée does sense the futility of life; and beneath all their hypocritical tales to one another about what might have been, one suspects that the old couple of "The Chairs" are aware that their lives have been meaningless. But whether they are aware of the nothingness of their lives or not, their leap out of the window into oblivion and the dumb orator who appears at the end with their message speaks clearly to the reader that this is the case.

¹Ibid., p. 13.

Only Berenger, the central figure in both "The Killer" and "Rhinoceros," is explicit in making the connection between his anxiety and absurdity: ". . . It's a sort of anguish difficult to describe. I feel out of place in life, among people, and so I take to drink. That calms me down and relaxes me so I can forget."¹ Forget what? The connection between anguish and absurdity is too near for the reader to fail to see. That Berenger should drink to forget informs too of the fearfulness which the absurd perception may arouse in that realization that life is meaningless. Berenger's anxiety may be seen too as a hint of his absolute alienation at the play's end--he in a second-story room, the streets below jammed with dust-stirring herds of rhinoceroses. His words that he will fight to the end, however, seem a rather hollow parody of Camus' injunction that the absurd man will choose to live even in the face of the absurd perception, in view of Berenger's having lost out in his appeal to become a rhinoceros himself.

Whereas the anguish of Berenger in "Rhinoceros" came at the end of a week of mechanical living, the anguish of Berenger in "The Killer" follows a moment of transcendent and euphoric weightlessness when he felt at one with the universe and immortal. His anguish is the anguish of recognizing that

¹Eugène Ionesco, "Rhinoceros," Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 17.

one is, after all, inescapably mortal, for immediately after his euphoria, he saw the world as it really was: ". . . everything went grey and pale and neutral again. . . . It was like a conjuring trick. . . . There was a kind of chaotic vacuum inside me, I was overcome with the immense sadness you feel at a moment of tragic and intolerable separation."¹ Berenger's anxiety is not greatly unlike that anxiety described by Camus which is felt when suddenly the poetic cloak is removed, and, "The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across millennia."² Berenger feels his weight, his mortality, his alienation.

The appeal to reason that Berenger makes when he faces death, the killer whom he has sought to apprehend, objectifies what is perhaps the most persistent and telling of all of the parallels to be seen between the motifs in Ionesco's drama and Camus' essay on absurdity. Camus has charged logic with failure to answer "this cry from the heart"³ that would allay the nostalgia for ultimate answers. Likewise, reason fails

¹Eugène Ionesco, "The Killer," The Killer and Other Plays, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 24.

²Camus, op. cit., p. 14.

³Ibid.

Berenger in the face of death. The absurdity of rationality in a world which is without reason is of course not limited to Berenger's petit bourgeois commonplaces. The failure of reason is to be seen everywhere in Ionesco's world. Believing in himself as the rational creature and believing in the necessity of his conventions, that man should feel anguished and estranged in a world where reason has failed and where language has become the chattering of parrots is not surprising. If Ionesco has successfully objectified such anguish and estrangement in such a world, then he has written absurd drama.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

Persons who have witnessed a play by Eugène Ionesco for the first time, or even those who have seen a third or fourth Ionesco play, almost inevitably leave the theatre engaged in speculation about what the play meant. Such a reaction obviously is not limited to Ionesco's works or those of the other writers of the Theatre of the Absurd, but the freedom with which Ionesco has created a dramatic world which is vastly different from either the real world, or the world of realistic drama, has made the puzzled reaction to his theatre the usual one. The viewer's conceptions of the physically possible are violated by such a spectacle as Amédée soaring through the air with a corpse-turned-parachute wrapped about his waist, and the viewer's conception that linguistic communication consists of familiar words arranged in a pattern that creates a logical statement is violated by characters who repeat jumbled letters of the alphabet. In short, an Ionesco production arouses in the viewer an anxiety, a nostalgia for order that Camus has said is inherent in every man. That wish to find order--and with order meaning--in Ionesco's drama was the exciting force that prompted this study.

A careful reading of Ionesco's plays disclosed that in

magnifying the disorder of the disorderly world which he saw about him, the playwright had disdained the orderliness of plot and character development to be found in traditional drama, so that the attempt to find meaning by a careful study of these key elements would be likely to yield little. His plays did contain pattern, however, in that certain recurrences in the drama formed motifs that could be seen consistently in the whole body of his work. The observation of these motifs suggested the method for finding meaning that was employed in this study. That method was a modification of Caroline Spurgeon's employment of image and motif to shed light upon Shakespeare's themes.

The examination of the recurrences in Ionesco's plays revealed the presence of sixteen motifs. In the search for a principle by which to unify the motifs, Ionesco's own writings were studied. That unifying principle was found in Ionesco's consistent expression of an anti-bourgeois attitude. The bourgeois man he defined as one who unthinkingly acquiesces in and conforms to the ideas of others. A second aspect of his definition applied the term to the fixed ideas and conventions by which the bourgeois man is manipulated and governed. One of those fixed ideas is the belief that ultimate questions about the existence of man can be solved through rational argument, and it is the negative position toward this view--stated by Albert Camus in "The Myth of Sisyphus"

and objectified by Ionesco on the stage--that most tellingly reveals the coincidence of Ionesco's anti-bourgeois attitude and his connection to absurdity.

Further study of the motifs disclosed that they could be combined first to show the properties of the world that Ionesco had created in his drama and second to show the behavior of the characters in response to a world dominated by fixed bourgeois conventions and ideas.

The motifs reveal that characters respond to their bourgeois world of fixed ideas in several ways: they become conformists, they have faith in a rational approach to life and its problems despite the evidence that theirs is an irrational world, they become obsessed with materialism, they lose the ability to communicate, they become dehumanized, and, above all, they become alienated--from themselves, from other human beings, and from the world about them.

If the writer of this thesis is correct in his belief that this study has demonstrated that meaning can be found in drama as disorderly as that of Ionesco through the examination of recurrent patterns that form significant motifs, then Jacques Guicharnaud is only partially justified in his belief that Ionesco has produced "a meaningless mirror of a meaningless world."¹

¹Jacques Guicharnaud in collaboration with June Beckelman, Modern French Theatre from Giraudoux to Beckett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 189.

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTIONS

"The Bald Soprano" was first produced by a group of young actors at the Theatre des Mathurins on May 11, 1950. The original French title was *Le Gendarme amoureux*.

"The Lesson," *La Leçon* in the French, was first produced at the Theatre de Poche on February 26, 1951.

"Jack or the Submission" was first produced in October of 1955 at the Theatre de la Michodiere. Robert Postec was the director and Jacques Noel the set and costume designer. The original French title was *Jacques et la soumission*.

"The Chair" was produced for the first time on April 22, 1952, at the Theatre de la Michodiere and was directed by Sylvain Thomas, who also played the role of the Visitor. Jacques Noel was the set designer. The original French title was *Le Chaise*.

"Amadeo or How to Get Rid of It" was first performed at the Theatre de la Michodiere on April 18, 1954. The original French title was *Amadeo ou Comment s'en debarrasser*.

APPENDIX

"The New Tenant" was first performed by a Swedish speaking company in Finland in 1955. It was later performed at the Arts Theatre in London in November of 1956 and in Paris in September of 1957. The French title was *Le Nouveau locataire*.

"Victims of Duty" was first produced in February of 1957 with Jacques Mauclair as the director. The French title was *Victimes de Devoir*.

"The Killer" was first produced in Paris by Jean Guiglio at the Theatre de la Michodiere on January 27, 1956. The original title was *Le Tueur*.

"Improvisation or The Shepherd's Childhood" was first produced by Maurice Jaubert in Paris at the Studio des Champs Elysees on February 23, 1955. The set and costumes were by Jean Guiglio. The original title was *L'Improvisation ou l'enfance du berger*.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTIONS

"The Bald Soprano" was first produced by a group of young actors at the Theatre des Noctambules on May 11, 1950. The original French title was La Cantatrice chauve.

"The Lesson," La Leçon in the French, was first produced at the Theatre de Poche on February 20, 1951.

"Jack or the Submission" was first produced in October of 1955 at the Theatre de la Huchette. Robert Postec was the director and Jacques Noel the set and costume designer. The original French title was Jacques ou la soumission.

"The Chairs" was produced for the first time on April 22, 1952, at the Theatre Lancry and was directed by Sylvain Dhomme, who also played the role of the Orator. Jacques Noel was the set designer. The original French title was Les Chaises.

"Amedée or How to Get Rid of It" was first performed at the Theatre de Babylone on April 14, 1954. The original French title was Amedée ou Comment s'en débarrasser.

"The New Tenant" was first performed by a Swedish speaking company in Finland in 1955. It was later performed at the Arts Theatre in London in November of 1956 and in Paris in September of 1957. The French title was Le Nouveau Locataire.

"Victims of Duty" was first produced in February of 1953 with Jacques Mauclair as the director. The French title was Victimes du Devoir.

"The Killer" was first produced in Paris by Jose Quaglio at the Theatre Recamier on February 27, 1959. The original title was Tueur sans Gages.

"Improvisation or The Shepherd's Chameleon" was first produced by Maurice Jacquemont in Paris at the Studio des Champs Elysees on February 20, 1956. The set and costumes were by Paul Coupille. The original title was L'Impromptu de l'Alma ou Le Cameleon du Berger.

"Maid to Marry" was first produced in Paris by Jacques Polieri at the Theatre de la Huchette on September 1, 1953. The original title was La Jeune Fille a Marier.

"Rhinoceros" was first produced in Paris by Jean-Louis Barrault at the Odeon on January 25, 1960. Barrault played the role of Berenger and William Sabatier played that of Jean. Daisy was played by Simone Valere. Orson Welles produced the London production at the Royal Court Theatre on April 28, 1960, with Laurence Olivier playing Berenger, Duncan Macrae playing Jean, and Joan Plowright acting the role of Daisy. The original title was Rhinoceros, although the original published version was Le Rhinoceros, the publishers making the error of using the definite article.

"The Leader" was first produced in 1953 with the original title being Le Maitre.

"The Future Is in Eggs or It Takes All Sorts to Make a World" was first performed in 1957. The French title was L'Avenir est dans les Oeufs ou Il faut de tout pour faire un monde.